THE HOUSE

By

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Translated by
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Omni regnum divisum contra se desolabitur; et omnis civitas vel domns divisa centra se non stabit. —*Matt. XII., 25.*



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CONTENTS

Book I

I The Kingdom 3
II The Dynasty 26
III The Enemies 57
IV The Treaty 74
V The Abdication 94

Book II

I The Pictures 109
II The Desire 134
III The Discovery of the Earth 149
IV The Café of the Navigators 170
V The Religious Controversy 186

Book III

I Politics 203
II The Circus 228
III The Plot 244
IV My Betrayal 259
V The Double Life 282
VI A Walk with Father 298
VII The First Departure 317

Book IV

I The Epidemic 337
II The Alpette 358
III The End of a Reign 378
IV The Heir 401

BOOK FIRST

THE HOUSE

I

THE KINGDOM

"WHERE are you going?"

"Oh, up to the house."

Put this question to little girls and boys that you see along the country roads, on their way from school or coming in from the fields, and you will get this answer.

Their bright eyes glisten like grass after a shower; their speech, unless they are timid, shoots straight out, like plants that claim all space to grow in undisturbed.

"Where are you going?"

They do not answer "home"; nor do they even say "to our house." They say "*the house.*" It may be a wretched, tumble-down shed: all the same it is the house, the only house in all the world. Some day there will be others,— perhaps. But that is not so certain, after all.

Even young men and women, and quite grown persons, married folk, if you please, use the same expression. *At the house* they used to do this, *at the*

structed, and her anticipation keyed up to pitch, she was introduced to the incomparable edifice, she had the effrontery to exclaim in a tone of surprise, "Is this it?"

I felt her disappointment. With the utmost courtesy I escorted her to her carriage — even when boiling over with rage one is polite to a woman — but I have never seen her since that day: I should not be able to endure the sight of her. Perfect understanding with a stranger concerning the places and things of one's childhood is simply impossible. It is a case of different dimensions. They are to be pitied, for their eyes are incapable of seeing. They do not see *the house*, they see only a house. How then are they to understand?

You come upon an iron gateway between two square granite columns; — the gate freshly painted and in three sections, those on either side bolted to the ground, permitting the use of only that in the centre. The three are opened only on grand occasions, for carriages and limousines. In old times they were opened for hay waggons. In old times, for that matter, you had only to push a little and you could go in by any gate you pleased, the bolts being out of commission. All sorts of unbidden folk used to come into the court, and to me their intrusions were highly disagreeable. Children are strongly conservative in their sense of proprietorship.

"What difference does it make?" grandfather would say.

Grandfather detested enclosures of any sort.

The stone columns used to be covered with moss, but now they are draped with climbing plants. The trees have been trimmed of the too-exuberant branches that used to seem to bend in blessing above the roof, or to tap upon the window panes. One never realises the vigour of a tree; grant it a few square yards and it soon overshadows them, and gradually draws nearer and nearer, like a friend who has the right of entrance. Now that our trees have been trimmed — for the time being — the sunlight caresses the walls of the old house, and this is better, in the matter of hygiene. Humidity is unwholesome, especially in autumn. But here is a puzzle; in my time, I mean in the time when I was young, there was a sun-dial carved in high relief upon the wall. Above it was a tarnished and half-effaced inscription, the secret of which I refused to penetrate: ME LUX, VOS UMBRA. Father had translated it for me and I made haste to forget it that I might still feel the thrill of the mysterious syllables. Above it was the iron finger whose slender shadow marked the hour all day long, and encircling it were the names of unknown cities, London, Boston, Pekin, and the rest, intended to show the differences in time the whole world round, as if the whole world were merely a dependance of the house, which dictated the laws of time to them all. But a linden tree, in an inadvertent moment, had rendered useless all this labour of light. The linden had indeed been pruned, but

by an unlucky mischance, when the front of the house was restored the entire dial had been covered with a coat of whitewash. Oh, ill-starred restoration! But am not I responsible, for was it not I who ordered it? Grown people are capable of just such profanities. They do it without meaning any harm. No doubt I had said, carelessly, "That poor dial is of no use." (The trees had not been trimmed then.) It is a mistake to let fall a thought; some one is sure to pick it up. A mason who had chanced to hear me actually thought to give me pleasure with his whitewash brush, and when I tried to restrain his zeal it was too late.

As a matter of fact, all these changes which I force myself to set down hardly affect me. Don't think me stoical to that degree. I simply do not see the house as it is. It might be besmeared from cornice to foundation and I should not notice it. I always see it as it was in my time — the time, of course you understand, when I was little. I have it thus before my eyes for all the rest of my life.

The nice old cracks that used to look, not like wrinkles but like smiles, have all been closed up. A wing has been added for the convenience of the domestic economy; and as the tiles were falling off the roof they have been replaced by slates. I have no quarrel with slates. There are some of an almost lilac grey, like the throat of a turtle-dove, that are very prisms for reflecting the light. But slate roofs are flat and monotonous, uniform and without

character, while tiles, rounded, irregular, humped, seem actually to stir, to move, to stretch themselves like the good old turtles in the garden, that sigh for fair weather, and hump their backs in protest against wind and rain. The colour of tiles shades from red to black, passing gradually or abruptly through all the diminishing tones between. And those who have eyes to see can guess at the age of the house entirely from the degree of their incrustation.

However, its age is accurately set down on the blackened tablet in the great chimney which is the glory of the kitchen. As soon as I rightly knew my letters and figures, father had set me to read the date, and I quite understood that he took pride in it, whereas grandfather sneered at the little ceremony, murmuring in the background, below his voice by way of not attracting too much attention, but quite distinctly enough for me to hear, "Do leave the child in peace!"

Was it 1610 or 1670? No one could be quite certain, short of calling together all our local academies. The stroke at the left of the upright was too horizontal for a 1 and not sufficiently so for a 7.

"It's not of the slightest importance," said grandfather, to whom I referred the matter.

However, I no longer doubted that it was 1610, when my history book informed me that this was the year of the assassination of Henry IV. My imagination demanded the association of a historic event

with the building of our house. "*The King left the Louvre in a coach. He occupied the back seat, the panels of which were open. The stopping of two carts at the entrance of the rue de la Ferronnerie, which was extremely narrow, forced the royal equipage to halt. At that very moment a man of thirty-two, of a sinister countenance, tall and very corpulent, red bearded and black haired, François Ravaillac, stepped with one foot upon the curb, the other upon the spoke of the wheel, and stabbed the King with two blows of a dagger, the second of which severed the pulmonary vein. Henri cried, 'I am wounded,' and almost instantly expired.*" I can recall word for word the account in the history-book which I have not been able to find. No doubt the terrible picture of the murder which it gave aids my memory. And I was able to appreciate the importance of the dates by the significant detail that the rascal's face infallibly proved that he was thirty-two years old — thirty-two, and not thirty-one or thirty-three. The rapidity of the drama in no wise prevented the accurate recognition of this detail. And when the historian added that the King was hastily carried back to the Louvre, bleeding from Ravaillac's poniard, I pictured to myself the procession as at the door of the house. The house was our Louvre.

The kitchen was probably, was surely, the finest, largest, most comfortable, most honourable room in the house; banquets and balls might have been given

in it. Such had been the custom in old times, and I should be the last to find fault with it. Though I have since dared to transform that kitchen into a hall paved with black and white marble, the walls handsomely done in panels of hard wood, and well lighted by a glass bay which occupies the entire side toward the sunset, I still find myself looking about me for stew-pans and frying-pans, and above all for the spit that used to turn there. I still smell the odours of ragouts and roasts, and whenever I see my guests entering the room I have an impulse to cry out upon the stupidity of the servants, exclaiming, "What possesses you to bring them in here!"

Here Mariette the cook held sway. Her power was absolute. Before her despotism people and furniture alike trembled. Happily, the wide spaces afforded room to escape her vigilant eye. There were shadowed corners where one could manage to keep out of sight, especially under the vast chimney mantel. The chimney had been put upon the retired list like an aged servant. I used not to know why; but I divine that it was from reasons of economy, for it was capable of consuming whole forests. Under its shelter one could make oneself quite comfortable on the old stone fire-dogs, that were cemented into their place. Bending back the head, one could see daylight at the top. In autumn, when night comes early, I used to look up to watch for a star. One night even, reluctantly crossing the kitchen, then

dark and deserted, I was terrified by a square of light lying white upon the hearthstone like an unfolded sheet. Was it the cast-off garment of a ghost? Perhaps they throw them off that way, at the moment of vanishing, leaving them as an incontrovertible witness to their visit. The moon was playing upon the roof.

The more coming and going there was, the better Mariette was pleased. Her tongue itched in solitude. As a general thing the postman, the farmer, the men who worked in the garden made their appearance there at regular intervals. Each and all were served with a glass of red wine, which they drank with unfailing observance of the rites. They lifted the elbow and said, "To your health," after which it was permitted to drain the glass; and if a second were desired, even without the slightest interval, the same formula must be observed. Never a one of them balked at its repetition. I have sometimes drunk in their company, no doubt from the same glass.

Folk would come also from the mountain villages to get father when a case was serious. Father, who was a doctor, never demurred at going with them. I can still hear his words of greeting, at once compassionate and resolute, when he crossed Mariette's empire and found it occcupied.

"What is wrong now, friend?"

Mariette would scan all newcomers with a wary yet perspicacious eye, which unmasked frauds and

congealed the blood in the veins of those unlucky wights whose arrival coincided with the sacred hour of a meal. I have been present at many an outpouring of peasant woes. They came out little by little, with a certain reticence of grief, as if illness were a disgraceful thing. I did not understand this reserve; indeed, it seemed to me simply slowness of speech.

The high-tide of the year, to the cook, was October, the vintage season. What comings and goings through the kitchen of vintagers at work in the wine-press! How important that their strength should be kept up by large reinforcements of boiled beef and potatoes, and how warm and savoury the steam that filled the kitchen from the great kettles! We children used to make the most of the confusion to settle ourselves upon the fire-dogs, our pockets full of nuts which the wind had scattered over the farm lane, or which we had ourselves surreptitiously knocked off with switches. A bit of flint served to crack them upon the hearth-stone. If they were still in their green husk a juice would squirt out, staining our hands and clothes with a pigment of which not the best soap could obliterate the tell-tale tokens. But the kernels, white as a fowl well dressed for a doll's dinner, would crunch most deliciously between our teeth. Or we would stealthily pop our chestnuts on a corner of the stove, revelling in the warmth after coming in, chilled through, from kicking dead leaves before us in the face of the autumn

winds; for in my country the winds are harsh and rude.

Many a time, too, have I curiously watched Mariette's movements as she killed a fowl. Her dexterity and her indifference were alike extreme. Like the most experienced headsman she would decapitate ducks that continued to run around, headless, to my great admiration. One day she asked me to hold a reluctant victim during the operation. I indignantly refused my co-operation, whereupon she exclaimed, with the contempt which she often affected:

"Ho! how squeamish we are! You are ready enough to eat them!"

I am not going to conduct you through the whole house. It would take too long, for there are two stories above the ground floor, the second being much less ancient than the first, and above that a garret and the tower. The tower, which you reach by a winding stair, has four windows commanding the four quarters of the horizon. This diversified view, too extensive for my taste, never interested me much. I suppose that children care little for things that extend indefinitely, things that do nothing, clouds, vague landscapes. On stormy days the wind made an infernal hubbub around the tower; one might have fancied it a living creature, ill-mannered and strong, heaping insults upon the walls before throwing them down. The staircase was none too light; at nightfall it was easy to get frightened there, and as the steps were very narrow on the side of the support-

ing pillar, you were likely to get a fine *carabosse* if you hurried. *Carabosse* was a word which Aunt Deen had invented for severe falls occasioned by hurrying; falls from which one picked oneself up lame, bruised and swollen; the word no doubt came from the wicked fairy Carabasse.

As for the garret, not one of us would have gone there without company. A single dormer window grudgingly admitted an insufficient light, just enough to give to the heaps of wood, faggots and cast-off things of all sorts that gradually accumulated there to wear out a useless existence, the appearance of instruments of torture or fearsome personages. Moreover, it was the battle ground of hosts of rats. From the rooms below one might have supposed they were amusing themselves with regularly organised obstacle races. Once in a while the cat was carried up there — a superb, lazy Angora, fond of good eating and little disposed to warfare. He was no doubt afraid of spoiling his fine coat, and would *meow* in terror until Aunt Deen, whose special care he was, released him from military duty, at no long delay.

The drawing room, the shades of which were generally drawn and which was only opened on ceremonial occasions or on reception days, was forbidden ground to us; and likewise my father's study, crowded with books, apparatus and vials. We ventured into it only for hasty explorations, but I used to see all sorts of forlorn creatures going in there,

who usually came out looking much happier. By way of compensation, the dining room was given over to us. It was the scene of many a tumult, and the chairs had more than once to be re-seated and their backs strengthened. Into mother's room, which was very large, we used to rush at all times. It was so centrally situated that every sound in the house reached it, and from it our mother quietly, and without attracting attention, watched over her whole domain; nothing went on in it that she did not know at once. In our eagerness for conquest we even took possession of the music room, a small octagon parlour, of marvellous acoustic properties, which opened upon a balcony looking southward. The family usually spent the summer evenings in this room, on account of the balcony.

I have still to tell of the garden. But if I describe it as it seems to me, you will think, like the lady from Paris, that it is one of those vast domains that surround historic chateaux. I have never yet been able to understand, as I walk in it now, how it could once have seemed so large to me; but as soon as I am no longer there it regains its true importance in my memory. Perhaps it is because in those days it was so ill kept that one easily gained the impression of being lost in it. With the exception of the kitchen-garden, the beds of which were straight and orderly, every part of it was at haphazard. In the orchard, where pears and peaches that our insinuating fingers were forever testing never succeeded

in ripening before they were picked, the grass grew thick and tall, as tall as me, upon my word! Always, in the orchard, I used to think of the virgin forests that the Children of Captain Grant travelled through. A rose garden, the *chef d'œuvre* of a flower-loving ancestor, bloomed in a corner whenever it felt so disposed, and with no aid either from pruning shears or watering pot. Mother used to work in it in her moments of rare leisure, but it really needed an expert in the art. The alleys were overgrown with weeds — one had to search to find a path. On the other hand, other walks that had never been laid out appeared in the very midst of the grass plots. And just under mother's windows there was a fountain; you didn't hear it in the daytime, you were so used to it, but in the night, when all was still, its monotonous wail filled all the silence and made me sad, I did not know why.

I have forgotten to mention the vines that were trained against the farm buildings, and which interested us only when we could relieve them of their grapes. And now at last I come to the loveliest tangle imaginable of bushes, brambles, nettles, and all sorts of wild plants, that was our own special domain. There we were masters and sovereign lords. There was nothing more before you reached the surrounding wall except a chestnut grove, which was simply an extension of our own empire. When I say chestnut grove, I mean four or five chestnut trees. But one alone could cast a wide shade.

There was one whose roots had overthrown a section of the wall. By this open breach, which I never approached without a sense of discomfort, I used to imagine that robbers might come in.

To be sure, I was armed. Father had told us the stories of the Iliad and the Odyssey, the story of Roland and various other tales of adventure, from the hearing of which I would sally forth all on fire, impetuous and heroic. By turns I would be the furious Roland or the magnanimous Hector. With my wooden sword I would give mortal combat to Greeks or Saracens, impersonated by certain shrubs, but of which the peaceable cabbages and unoffending beets sometimes bore the brunt as I cut right and left among them.

My arms were provided by one of the queer labourers we used to employ in the garden or about the vines. There were three of them, each working by himself in his corner, each with his special qualifications but with undefined duties, though care was taken to keep them apart. They detested one another. Where had they been picked up? Their selection was no doubt due to grandfather's inveterate indifference, for he let every one, including the property, go his own way. Or perhaps it was due to mother's tender heart, for she was easily capable of having fished up such pitiful wrecks of humanity as these.

The first and earliest in my memory, the one who was my armourer into the bargain, went by the name

of Tem Bossette. Both appellations were nicknames, I suppose, and their origin is not hard to discover. *Tem* must have been derived from Anthelmus, who is a saint venerated in our province. As for the nickname Bossette, I long supposed it to be an indelicate allusion to the curve of his back, due to long leaning over the spade. But I have found an etymology that better suits his character, especially his laziness, and I humbly submit it to messieurs the philologers, who will be able, according to their custom, to consecrate to it several folio volumes. In our country the word *bosse* has more than one meaning; it especially designates the cask in which the vintage is deposited for convenient removal from the vineyard, and I can still see the bewilderment stamped upon the countenance of a friend to whom I was doing the honours of my native town, on reading a poster, a simple little poster, containing the words *For sale, an oval bosse.* "Happy region," he commented, "where hunchbacks can carry their gibbosities to market." He thought himself very clever when he added, "But do they find purchasers?" I explained to him his mistake. Now Tem was a notable drunkard. Our cellar knew that better than any one. *Bossette,* little wine cask; he also could contain a grape harvest; and even, toward the close of his life, the diminutive might have been suppressed.

He used to make swords for me out of the stakes on which the vines were tied. In recompense I used

to bring him extra bottles of wine, which I procured from Aunt Deen, who had special charge of the cellar, urging upon her the splendour of my armament. From time to time there arose a complaint that the vine trellises were defective and the untrained branches trailing on the ground, absorbing dampness. But grandfather, good naturedly indifferent, never blamed any one, and please reckon up how many stakes were necessary to my complete equipment. I needed them for my panoplies, I needed them for my stables. The number of my horses bore witness to my magnificence. With a stick between my legs I acquired an astonishing velocity, and for each battle I must needs change horses.

Tem Bossette would have been tall if he had stood up straight, but as to his stoutness there was no question, and his round head greatly resembled a pumpkin. "Big head, little wit," Mimi Pachoux used to say of him, pursing up his lips. Mimi Pachoux was gardener, orchard man, lamp man, smoke doctor, locksmith, cabinet maker, mender of clocks and china, floor-waxer, wood-sawyer, errand man and I know not what more. Oh, yes, in the winter he used to be bearer of the dead. Did any difficulty arise, was any help needed? "Call Mimi!" grandfather would say. And they would call Mimi — a matter of several hours, for no one ever knew where he was, so that when he at last arrived the work

would be done; but every one gave him the credit of it.

"That Mimi, he no sooner comes than everything goes well!"

Picture to yourself a little scrap of a man, thin, clean, prompt, lively and invisible into the bargain. Invisible, that is what I mean, unless you would prefer to grant him the gift of ubiquity. Every morning he would begin a half dozen days' works; here at six o'clock, and perhaps earlier — oh, that Mimi! What zeal! — At five past six at another job, and before the quarter hour at a third, loudly announcing himself at the first, running to the second, flying to the third, slipping in here, stealing out secretly, running back furtively, replying here, explaining there, protesting elsewhere, appearing, disappearing, reappearing, beginning in haste, going on in a hurry, finishing nothing, and at evening getting paid in three places at once. Grandfather used to say that several persons among his acquaintance could see their double. Father would observe that it was a well known malady, requiring nothing but drink for its production. I tried it once, but I saw everything shifting about. It was Tem Bossette who used to drink, but our Mimi Pachoux could see his triple.

As to the third member of our force, it was essential never to lose sight of him for a minute, because of his fixed determination to hang himself. He had

made several attempts that had ended in failure. We used to watch him in relays. Mariette would refuse him the slightest bit of cord, however pressing his need of it, and he was carefully assigned to work where the uncovered spaces were largest. In early days he used to be called Dante, but his name was really Beatrix. His nickname was given him by the keeper of our departmental archives, a man of wit. His face was long and woebegone, and he was so possessed with the desire to hie him to the lower regions that it was continually necessary to cut his rope. By degrees he came to be called Le Pendu, or the Hanged, and was known by no other name. Very few were willing to employ him because of the police force requisite to ward off his catastrophes. Mother was his providence. The heavy jobs were intrusted to him, but he generally gave them over to Aunt Deen, who was strong, active, and capable of moving even the heavy casks, while he looked on with admiration, open-mouthed and with swinging arms. His mouth contained only two teeth, which by marvellous good luck were precisely one above the other, so that when one met the other you might suppose that it was one tooth uniting the two jaws.

You can understand to what a degree our garden was neglected. Should I have loved it more, blooming with flowers and fruits, than in this lamentable condition, in which it seemed to me immense and measureless and mysterious?

Dear old garden, with your crazy weeds, always

a little too damp and much too shady because of branches left to their own will, where I have played so much and invented so many games, where I have known the glory of combat, the wonders of exploration, the pride of conquest, the intoxication of freedom; not to mention the friendship of trees and the pleasantness of fruit gathered in secret! Who would recognise you to-day? Raked, reduced to order, pruned, watered, your alleys sanded, your turf cut close around the flower urns, never flatter yourself that you can dazzle me with your beauty!

When I walk in my garden I still go as I please, trampling down the borders, treading underfoot the grass plots, endangering the flowers, until the new gardener — who by himself alone only too ably replaces Tem Bossette, Mimi Pachoux, and the Hanged — cries out in a voice of consternation:

"Do take care, sir!"

I must excuse him. He does not know that I am walking in my garden of long ago.

To complete this portrait of the house, there still is lacking — oh, almost nothing! Almost nothing yet almost everything, two things indeed, a shadow and a footstep.

The footstep was my father's; no one ever mistook it. Rapid, regular, resonant, it was his and no other's. Once it was heard on the threshold a magic change passed over everything. Tem Bossette plied his spade with unsuspected vigour, Mimi

Pachoux, till then invisible, popped up like an imp out of a bottle. The Hanged tackled the heaviest casks, Mariette stirred her fire, all of us children came to order, and grandfather — I don't know why — went out. Was there a difficulty to solve, a trouble to bear, a danger to fear? Let some one say, "Here he is," and it was all over, every anxiety dissipated, every one taking a long breath as after a victory. Aunt Deen especially had a way of saying, "Here he is," which would have put to flight the most daring aggressor. It was as much as to say, "Just wait! You will see what will happen. It won't take long: Another minute and justice will be done!" Once aware of his presence, we felt in ourselves an invincible strength, a sense of security, of protection, of an armed peace, and also a sense of being under command. Each had his own part. But grandfather loved neither to command nor to be commanded.

And the shadow — it was my mother's, there behind the half closed window blind, whenever all the family was not gathered around her. She is waiting for father, or for our return from school. Some one is absent, and she is anxious. Or the weather is threatening — she is looking at the sky, wondering whether to light the blessed candle.

A different sort of peace emanates from her, a peace — how shall I describe it? — that reaches beyond the things of life, that enters into one and calms the nerves and heart, the peace of love and

prayer. That shadow, which I used to look for every time I came in, that I look for now, though well enough I know that it is not there, that it is elsewhere — that shadow was the soul of the house, showing through it as thought shows in a face.

Thus were we guarded.

Beyond the house was the town, on a lower level, as was fitting, and still beyond a great lake and the mountains, and more distant still, the rest of the world. But all these were simply dependencies of The House.

II

THE DYNASTY

THOSE days were in the reign of my grandfather. A long line of ancestors must have reigned before him, to judge by the portraits in the drawing room. Most of these portraits were now much blackened, so that unless there was a flood of light it was pretty difficult to guess what the frames held. One of the most defaced of them was the one that most commanded my admiration. Only the face and one hand were visible — they might have been a woman's face and hand; but I had been told of the important part their owner had borne in the wars, and I wondered how so young and handsome a man could have fought so much. The lady with the rose attracted me, too. No matter on what side of her I stood, from every side she smiled upon me and showed me her flower. I pass over certain stern faces trussed up in high collars, swathed in huge neckcloths, as if afflicted with colds, and come to two portraits which occupied the place of honour on the right and left of the chimney. One wore a blue coat laced with silver, a scarlet waistcoat, white knee breeches and the three-cornered hat of the French Guard. The other wore the bear-skin cap and the blue great

coat with gilt buttons and red braid on sleeves and collar of a grenadier of the Old Guard. The soldier of the King and the soldier of the Emperor were companion pictures. To judge by their decorations, both had well served France. Father had proudly told me of their exploits, and explained their grade. I could not look at them without a sort of reverential fear. They were not handsome, having more bone than flesh, and features all out of drawing, but I should not have dared to call them ugly. Their eyes, severely fixed upon me, troubled me. They reproached me for not having achieved wonderful victories like that of the grenadier at Moscow, or for at least not having undergone heroic defeat like the French Guard at Malplaquet. For a long time these two were the only names of battles that I knew. And I used to blush for Tem Bossette's wooden sabres and the laths that I bestrode. I understood that my feats of horsemanship in the garden were not serious, were not real. Those two redoubtable portraits sometimes puffed me up with pride and again overwhelmed me with their importance. One day when I was gazing upon them with some uneasiness grandfather came by, and with his little dry smile and his most impertinent pursing of the lips, let fall the words,

"Pooh! They are only bad paintings."

It is dangerous to teach too much esthetics to a child. I was glad that they were bad paintings. In a moment the soldier of the King with his three-

cornered hat and the soldier of the Emperor with his bearskin cap lost all their fascination. Thenceforth their story was nothing to me. I was set free from the servitude of a compelled admiration. I at once felt my superiority over a badly painted past, and could judge the gallery of ancestors with insolence.

One day the subject of exiling them to the garret was agitated. Grandfather desired to replace them with engravings.

"They are of the eighteenth century," he observed, by way of settling the question, making the statement simply and courteously, as the most natural thing in the world. But Aunt Deen exclaimed indignantly and father exerted that calm authority that broke down all resistance. Grandfather did not insist; he never insisted. But I understood him, since they were bad paintings.

Grandfather's government was negligent and fitful. As well say he had no government. When I read in my history book, or in that of my elder brothers, the chapter consecrated to the sluggard kings I immediately thought of grandfather. He made no point at all of his prerogatives. And yet his name was Augustus. I knew it, because great-aunt Bernardine, she whom we called Aunt Deen, and who was his sister, called him Augustus, though as seldom as possible, for his name irritated him.

"Yes," he said one day, "they named me Augustus — why the mischief I don't know. That's an-

other trick that ancestors have. They fasten a ridiculous label upon you for all your days."

Though of medium height, grandfather gave the impression of being tall, because of his fine head, which he was not in the least proud of and carried with indifference. His well-cut nose was slightly aquiline. His white hair, which he would never have had cut but for Aunt Deen's abrupt interventions, curled a little, and he was continually thrusting his fingers through his long beard,— which waved like that of the Emperor Charlemagne in the pictures,— lest some grains of tobacco should be caught in it, for he smoked and took snuff. On a nearer view the impression as of a prophet which he first gave gradually faded away and vanished. He looked down too often, or lifted upon you vague eyes that refused to see you. You felt that you did not exist, so far as he was concerned, and nothing is more irritating than that. He cared for nothing and for no one. His clothes hung upon his body by the grace of God and Aunt Deen. He never knew whether they were well or ill fitting, and as to changing them he would gladly have worn them till they left him first. The more worn they were the more was he at ease in them. I fancy that he had never known the use of suspenders, and cravats seemed to him a wretched concession to fashion. He detested whatever restricted his movements and would have been content to wear all day long the green dressing gown and the black velvet Greek cap

in which he felt at ease, and which he did sometimes wear to the midday breakfast. When my brothers and I saw him appear in this accoutrement we would be bursting with laughter which a glance from our father forced us to smother; but the same glance seemed to include a reproof of the famous dressing gown.

It was with great difficulty that grandfather could be induced to be regular at meals.

"Oh," he would say good-naturedly, "one eats when he is hungry. Rules for meal times are absurd."

"Still," father would urge, evidently not pleased, but endeavouring to speak gently — yet even in our father's gentleness we felt an impression of authority —"still there must be order in a household."

"Order, order, oho!"

You should have heard his "ohos!" uttered softly, warily, in a sort of aside, yet striking at all established order, and accompanied by a little dry laugh. That little laugh at once placed grandfather above his interlocutors. Nothing have I ever met in all the forms of human expression more disquieting, more mocking, more ironical, than that little laugh. It at once gave you the idea that you were a beast. It produced upon me the effect of the sharp clip of the shears when the rose bushes are pruned; *ric, rac,* the flowers fall; *ric, rac,* there are none left. By his little laugh, involuntarily, no doubt, grandfather offered an insult to all the world.

His presiding at table was honorary and not effective. Not only did he not direct the conversation, he followed it but fitfully, when it interested him. For that matter, he assumed no responsibility about anything. When he walked in the garden, visited the vines, Tem, Mimi and The Hanged utterly failed to extract from him any directions. He would simply make a vague gesture which signified "Let me alone." The trio did not make a point of receiving instructions, for his silence suited them, but matters went none the better in consequence.

Besides his laugh, he had another claim to superiority, his violin. Was he not in the drawing room among the portraits, young and curly-haired, with a guitar in his hands?

"Never in my life have I twanged that odious instrument," he one day protested. "But a wandering Italian felt impelled to make a daub of me."

"You were so beautiful," asserted Aunt Deen. "The artist was all enthusiasm over you."

"Oh, the artist!"

He would spend long hours in his room playing his instrument, but he devoted still more time to examining it lovingly, handling it, tightening or loosening the strings, touching the bow with resin, as mowers in the fields so often spend more time whetting their scythes than in mowing, indefinitely making music upon them with a stone.

When grandfather played he turned every one out of his room. He played for himself alone, and in

general the same airs, for I often listened at the door; and in after years I used to recognise passages that he played from the Freischütz and Euryanthe, the Magic Flute and the Marriage of Figaro. Mozart's pure rhythms were to me like that joy in breathing that one takes in childhood without noticing it, as limpid water takes on the contours of a vase; but Weber gave me a vague desire for things which I could not describe. I seemed to be in the heart of a forest, with paths stretching away interminably into the lost distances.

The pieces that he played were not all of equal merit, though I could not know that. Everything is good to a child in the springtime of sentiment. To this day I can not hear the overture to Poet and Peasant without emotion. One evening at Lucerne, by the lake side, the most ordinary of orchestras in the most ordinary of hotels began that overture. Around me men in dinner jackets and ladies in evening gowns went on chatting and laughing as if they heard nothing, as if they were deaf, yet I felt utterly alone, my heart melting and I thought I should weep. The orchestra was not playing for the public, it was playing for me alone, no longer the mediocre art of the Austrian composer, but the memory of my entrance as a child into the mysterious realm of sound and dreams, in the forest whose paths stretch away into the infinite.

At the same period the singing of one of my school comrades quite overcame me. It was at a first com-

munion service. I had not yet been admitted to the Holy Table and was at leisure to listen. He sang that melody of Gounod, *Heaven Has Visited the Earth*, and quite truly heaven was visiting me, taking me by storm, carrying me away. My whole enraptured being made a part of that song. The voice rose high, higher, it seemed that it must break, that it was not strong enough to bear up those mighty notes that filled all the chapel. It seemed like those tall fountains, so slender that the wind carries them away, so that they never fall to earth. That voice was indeed broken as the boy became a youth; death carried away my comrade in his sixteenth year.

Then there was a music box that father had brought me from Milan whither he had been summoned for a consultation. When the screw was turned it gave forth soft, thin, somewhat quavering notes, and a little dancer would pirouette upon the cover. Gravely and in cadence with the music she would point her toes and take her position as if she were accomplishing a sacred rite, a sweet yet sad little spectacle. How many times have I been disenchanted in later years when I discovered that my partners in the ball were frivolous, when I had expected to find in them tender sweetness, that sacred sadness of the little dancer of my music box.

The sluggard kings in my history book were accompanied by mayors of the palace, who, at first

mere officers charged with the interior government, became prime ministers and even masters of their masters. In school we heard eulogiums upon Pepin d'Heristal and Pepin the Short, who became the father of Charlemagne. Grandfather was not a very serious king and I quite expected father to take over the power. But why did he treat grandfather with so much respect, instead of dispossessing him? History had taught me to expect a different attitude. To the farmers, labourers and servant folk grandfather was just *Monsieur*, or *Monsieur Rambert*, and father was *Monsieur Michel*. It would never have entered any one's head to call upon monsieur, to consult monsieur, to ask monsieur for an order. Monsieur would have been the first to protest. "What do you want of me? Leave me in peace. I have no time (I could never understand why he had no time). Go to Monsieur Michel." Thus he himself set the example. I had concluded like every one else that he was good for nothing. Yet once in a while, no one knew why, he would protest against being left out in matters of the palace — I mean to say, of the house. But whenever a serious matter was in question, an important order to be given, one would hear on all sides the cry, "Where is Monsieur Michel? Call Monsieur Michel!"

I have spoken of my father's step. There was also his voice, sonorous, thrilling, cheery. He never raised it, he knew that there was no need. It opened doors, penetrated to the most distant rooms, and at

the same time poured into the heart new strength, like a good glass of red wine — as folk declare who understand such things. When he came late to dinner because of the crowd of patients who hung upon him, there was no need to ring the bell,— from his ante-room he would proclaim, as it were an edict, "Dinner!"

And the dispersed family would make haste to assemble.

"What a voice!" grandfather would protest, starting as if in amazement.

I can never read expressions like the following, which occur more or less in all manuals of history, save in those of the present day in which battles are juggled with as if they gained themselves — *At the voice of their chief the soldiers rushed to the assault. — At the voice of their general the troops rallied* — without hearing my father's voice echoing through all the house. Tem Bossette, who was fearfully afraid of it, would hear it from the uttermost vines. The step announced a presence, but the voice gave orders. And yet the labourers were not under my father; all the same every one of them felt that he was the head. Everything about him conspired to give this impression; his height, his clear cut features, crossed by a short stiff moustache, his piercing eyes, the gaze of which one did not like to encounter. A sort of fascination emanated from his person. Aunt Deen, who shared the general sentiment, would say *my nephew*, as if bursting with pride.

The grenadier in the drawing-room could not have pursed up his lips otherwise to speak of the Emperor. I had not escaped this fascination, and even in my days of revolt I never ceased to pay him secret worship. But the spirit of liberty impels us to act contrary to our surest instincts, under pretext of asserting our liberty.

Do not think he was severe with us. He became terrible only when we were taking the wrong direction. Only, I have never known in any one else such an aptitude for command. In spite of his absorbing profession he found time to look after our studies and plays, and even to add to both by the epic stories which with consummate art he used to tell us. My memory retains them to this day, and will retain them always. It was easy to see that he honoured the family portraits. He made the past of our ancestors live again for us, but I could never forget that they were bad paintings.

When we felt ourselves observed by father we understood that in his glance, which encompassed our weakness with his strength, there was something besides tenderness and perhaps pride, but what was it? I know now that he was seeking in each one of us forecasts of our future. The antiquity of our race was not enough to satisfy his love of permanence; he would fain follow it into the obscure travail of the future and consolidate its unity. Even our happiness was less dear to him than the obedience of our will to the common task. The father's glance

enfolds within it the child's image; the child knows that well, and it is all he needs to know.

While we were very little he taught us reverence for what he called our vocation. From our earliest years we felt its importance. My sister Mélanie, who was oldest of all, my brothers Bernard and Stephen had early decided upon theirs — for Bernard the army, for the other two the mission field. Father never thought of opposing them, although perhaps these choices forced him to resign hopes that he had cherished. The laughing Louise would marry, there was no hurry about that. As for Nicola and James, they were still too little for much thought about their future.

"And you?" my father had asked me.

As I had no answer ready, he gave utterance to his desire.

"You will remain with us."

Thus it was agreed that I was to remain, to take charge of the household. The part assigned to me hardly allured me; it seemed tame and commonplace, whereas the destinies of the others were adorned with all the glamour of leaving home. I neither confirmed nor opposed the plan proposed for my future, but within myself I felt a wild desire to be set free from these arrangements, from this power that dominated me. Secret longings to rebel even against those I loved began to germinate within me. Later they were destined to grow, under an influence at that time unforeseen.

I ought now to tell about The Queen. Is it not her turn? Yet in truth I can not do it and you must not ask me to. That shadow which I always seek as I return to the house, and which our absence was always enough to disquiet — I can only invoke her presence there. It is indeed she, but remote and hidden. When I try to draw near her I can find no words.

Have you observed, on fine summer days, the blue haze that floats over the hillsides and helps to bring out the delicate contours of the earth? If I could throw a transparent veil like that over my mother's face, it seems to me that I should have more courage to tell of her sweetness, to describe the pureness of those eyes which could not believe in evil. What unknown strength was concealed beneath that sweetness? Grandfather, who could ward off any influence merely by his irritating little laugh, and who never laid aside this weapon of defence even with his son, invariably abandoned it before my mother. And my father, whose authority seemed to be absolute and infallible, would turn to her as if he recognised in her some mysterious power.

I know now what that power was: it was God dwelling in her, whether she had been to meet him at early mass, before any one else was up and stirring, or whether she had offered to him her daily labours in the house. . . .

My brothers and sisters and I were the people. In every kingdom there must be a people. It is true that in most houses now-a-days one wonders what has become of the people. The king and queen, dejected as two weeping willows, are wearily watching one another grow old. They have no one to govern and they will not lay aside their crown. At our house the people were numerous and noisy. If you can count, you already know that there were seven of us, from Mélanie who was seven years older than I, to James, who was six years younger.

Before being led into action, the whole battalion used to undergo a preliminary inspection from Aunt Deen, who was in charge of the review of details.

Aunt Deen was endowed with an activity which years could not abate, and of which all the servants except Mariette shamelessly took advantage. Always coming and going, from cellar to garret, always on the stairs — for she invariably forgot half the things she intended to do, or suddenly interrupted whatever she might be doing — beginning to sweep, leaving off to hunt dust under a piece of furniture, warring against spider's webs with a wolf's head — a sort of brush fastened to the end of a long pole,— or rushing to the aid of one of us who had cried out, she had rocked, washed, dressed, cuddled, watched over, amused, kept busy, cared for and caressed all seven of us, and even an eighth, who had died before I could remember.

"It was the hope of Spring time
And all a mother's love."

Sometimes it would be the prisoner Silvio Pellico who in heart-rending strains longed for his Italian breezes. One of my earliest plays was the escape of Silvio Pellico, though I had no idea who he was. My favourite songs were perhaps "The Pool" and "Venice." I call them thus because I knew no other titles for them. "The Pool" told of a fearful tragedy from drowning:

Little children, have a care
When you run across and follow.
There's a deep pool hidden there
By the dark trees in the hollow.

Listen to what happened there,
When a child with golden hair,
Slipped away from his mamma-a-a.

The fair child was running after a dragon-fly, and "the maiden with golden wings" enticed him into the cold water. That would teach him not to steal away from the maternal arms! As for "Venice," I remember likewise the first lines, with all their doggerel:

If God should favor-ize
My noble enterprise,
I'll hie me to Ven-ize
And spend my days in joy.

Whether from the magic of the name of an unknown city, or the melancholy air of the ritornello,

I could in those days imagine no more enchanting journey than to go to that Venice whose gondolas I had been shown in a stereoscope. In later years, dreading disappointment, I hesitated long before carrying out the plan born of that far-away music — the music that we still hear within ourselves long after childhood's days are past. Can it be that this is one of the surest guardians of the home? — that a simple lullaby, sung to quiet us, is the first spark to kindle our imaginations? And when, long after, I at last saw the city of flowing streets and rosy palaces, I entered it with respect, recalling to mind that my visit represented a "noble enterprise"; as if all its wondrous charm had been enfolded in Aunt Deen's cradle-song.

I imagine that some of her innumerable songs were of her own invention. Or at least, having forgotten their precise words, I suppose that she recomposed them after her own fashion. There was especially a certain "Father Gregory," half recited, half sung, which is hardly likely to be found in any collection. A charming old lady to whom I repeated it one day assured me that Father Gregory was known also in Berry, in the neighbourhood of Châtre, under the name of Father Christopher. The song, a sort of rhythmical prose, was declaimed in a singsong, suddenly bursting into a tune in the final syllables. A whole little comedy of vanity is summed up in a few phrases. You may judge for yourself from the version of it that I tell from memory.

Father Gregory came out of his house this morning. Perfectly natural thus far; Father Gregory is going to take a walk, as is his right; but wait till you hear a detail that characterises this promenade: *in his hat a fine bouquet of poppies.* You must swell out your voice with the poppies. This field flower becomes a symbol of pomp and ostentation. Aha! Father Gregory is no longer a worthy fellow who goes out to inhale the breezes of the country-side; he is an old beau who puts on airs; he parades, he struts, he capers, he expects to be gazed at and admired. But you will be punished, Father Gregory; ill-luck awaits you!

On the way his dog began to fight with mine. This bit of news is simply announced. It seems at first to be of slight importance. A bad thing nevertheless,— a dog fight in a little town. What! you don't know that? You have never lived in the country? A dog fight is a matter of special gravity. The masters intervene, they take sides, and the defeated one swears that the matter shall not end here. Whole families have been embroiled through a dog fight. What was the origin of the enmity between the Montagus and the Capulets? Perhaps a dog fight. And just this way our Father Gregory undertakes to interfere; his dog is getting the worst of it, rolled in the dust as a dumpling in flour. *Father Gregory, trying to part them, tumbles, nose first, in the filth.* He rushes to the rescue with uplifted cane, his foot slips, and behold him on the ground in a lamentable

posture, especially his nose, having made a most unlucky choice of a spot upon which to fall. At this point it is proper to assume a melancholy tone, the apostrophe which follows reaching a note of heart-rending grief. *Poor Father Gregory!* A pause. He is to be pitied, for his misfortune is great. But suddenly, pity becomes sarcasm, pointing to his pride. *See his bunch of poppies, far from his hat!* The emblems of his vanity are soiled. He himself may go home, and wash and brush himself, but he can never use the poppies again, and but for them nothing would have happened to him.

I attribute Father Gregory to Aunt Deen because of the fertility of her imagination, which daily provided her with new stories for our delectation. Grown persons are not often on a level with children: they take too low a place. Aunt Deen had an instinct for what was suited to us. Her stories kept us breathless. When I try to rescue them from the past, for her credit, they fly before me, smiling. "No, no," they say — for I get close to them, only between us is a great chasm, deep, though not wide, which is the common grave of all my vanished years —"what is the use? You can never do anything with us. See: we have taken the colour of that time: how are you to describe that?"

When grandfather came upon us sitting in a circle around our story-teller, he would shake his head disapprovingly.

"*Fiddle-faddles,*" he would murmur; "*fiddle-*

faddles. One owes it to children to tell them the truth."

We would ask Aunt Deen what *fiddle-faddles* were, and she would answer, by way of getting her revenge, "It's what one does when one plays the violin."

Between her songs and grandfather's violin there was sometimes a deafening discord.

Aunt Deen possessed another marvellous faculty — that of inventing words. I have already told you of *carabosser,* but she invented them by the hundred, so well adapted to their purpose that we understood them at once. I can not transcribe them — they lose their value when written down. Indeed I don't know how to spell them; spoken language is not the same as written language, and her picturesque words had all the savour and crispness of popular speech. Aunt Deen also used rare words — where she found them is a mystery for she seldom read — strange and sonorous words and phrases that seemed her special property, and which since then, to my surprise and amusement, I have discovered in the dictionary, where I should never have thought of looking for them. Thus, to call down my pride, she one day called me a hospodar, and another day, "the purveyor in chief of mustard to the Pope." I did not know that the hospodars were the tyrants of Wallachia, and that to believe oneself purveyor of mustard to the Pope meant to have a high opinion of oneself. These strange titles with which she invested me used to make me think of some big man,

all in red, issuing commands in a loud voice, and I did not enjoy being likened to him.

Dear great-aunt Deen, let me apostrophise you after the manner of poor Father Gregory! If my early childhood rings musically in my memory, as if it were mounted upon one of those mules all bedight with sleigh-bells, that can not move without giving forth a multitudinous jingle from far away as if to announce the approach of a great train, I owe it to your stories and your songs. As soon as thought summons it, and that is daily, here it comes, loudly ringing its joy-bells, because of which I shall never have reason to complain of fate. Before I see it, I hear it — that merry procession of memory; and when, at some turn of the road that leads from the past to the present, it suddenly comes upon me, it bears in its arms all the flowers of the springtide. You well deserve the bouquet of them that I pick for you, even a bouquet of poppies, as a guerdon for all the stories that you added to your care and prayers. For you were always praying audibly, on the stairs or in church or even under the banner of the wolf's head itself. Silence was painful to you. That is why, dear Aunt Deen, I break it this evening and talk to you.

Aunt Deen kept strenuous watch outside of the house. To get inside you had, like the wolf in Hans Christian Andersen, to show a white paw like a sheep. She designated by the name of *they* the invisible foes

that were supposed to be investing it. For a long time these mysterious *they* terrified us. We used to look around whenever she spoke of them. By dint of never meeting them we at last came to laugh at them, little thinking that this laugh disarmed us, and that thus disarmed we should surely meet them later in flesh and blood. Her loyalty was never caught napping. The moment the family was in question she would insist upon a meed of praise being at once awarded it, failing which she promptly assumed the defensive, ready for battle. A certain person who ventured to speak of it in colourless terms found himself scanned from head to foot, and to mask his sense of defeat took refuge in sarcasm:

"I forgot," said he, "that your house was the Ark of the Covenant."

"And yours Noah's Ark," she retorted with a *tic* for his *tac*, knowing that her interlocutor harboured all sorts of shady folk.

In those days the bread was made in the kitchen in a kneading trough nearly a hundred years old, before being carried for baking to the town oven. Aunt Deen, who loved all sorts of cookery, used to oversee the operation, and even at times take a hand in it herself. One day when I was looking on, at the moment when the servant was about to mingle the flour, water and leaven, my aunt suddenly gave her a vigorous shake.

"What are you thinking of, girl?"

"Mixing the bread, miss."

"You are forgetting the sign of the cross."

For in serious houses no one omitted the sign of the cross over white flour that was on the point of being made into bread. At table, before cutting the loaf, father never failed to trace upon it a cross, with two strokes of the knife. When it fell to grandfather to cut the bread I was quick to notice that he did nothing of the kind.

That was one of my first surprises. From my earliest days I understood the importance of differences of opinion in matters religious.

Grandfather played his violin whenever he pleased. But he did not like to be disturbed. We learned this by experience. My sister Mélanie and my brother Stephen, who had retained from their first communion an ardent and somewhat aggressive piety, had built up a little chapel in a cupboard in that octagon parlour which we used to call the music room because in former days concerts used to be given there, and an old grand piano still stood there. It had been agreed among us that when Mélanie and Stephen were grown up they were to evangelise the savages, just as Bernard was to be an officer and win back Alsace and Lorraine, and Louise, the second sister, always generous, was to marry a champagne grower so that we might always drink as much as we chose of that sparkling golden wine to which we had never put our lips except on occasions of family festival. Thus the future was beautifully arranged for, except my own personal career which re-

mained uncertain. Mélanie had been named for the little shepherdess of Dauphiny who at that time was much in people's minds; the mystery of La Salette was talked of in guarded words. Sometimes I would ask her if she was not afraid of being eaten by cannibals, the existence of which had been revealed to me by my illustrated geography. Far from cooling her zeal, this frightful prospect simply warmed it. Stephen aspired no less ardently to martyrdom, notwithstanding that an unlucky adventure had happened to him in school: his comrades, admiring his devotion, had counted upon his performing a miracle on the day of his first communion, and the miracle not coming off, he was consequently held in some slight contempt.

I can never remember what sort of vespers or complines we used to say before the cupboard. The ceremonies consisted of hymns vociferated in chorus. Notwithstanding my tender years I was invited to share in these clerical manifestations. On that occasion we used to hold forth with all the energy of neophytes. Mélanie in particular would pitch her voice in its highest key, her piety being proportionate to the noise she made. Unluckily the music room was near grandfather's chamber. All of a sudden, as we were at the utmost height of fervour, the door opened and grandfather appeared. He never used to pay much attention to us, though when we came within his visual angle he would look affably upon us. But this time he appeared to be greatly

irritated. His dressing-gown flowing behind him, his Greek cap awry, his beard all disorder, gave him a fearsome aspect, greatly in contrast with his usual manner. He exclaimed harshly, "It's impossible to have a moment's peace in this house. Shut that cupboard, quick!"

We had disturbed his siesta, and his usually even temper was the worse for it. We hastily closed the cupboard. And we knew in that moment all the horror of arbitrary decrees and special laws. The devotion of Mélanie and Stephen was but increased, as always happens in time of persecution, but mine, less lively, or of younger growth, was cooled, I greatly fear.

Not long after it experienced another blow. In our town the Fête-Dieu was celebrated with incomparable pomp and display. People came from afar to take part in it. Where shall we have again such nobly imposing and magnificent spectacles? They have been replaced by gymnastic contests, or processions of mutual aid societies, the bad taste of which is heartbreaking. I pity the children of to-day who have never had opportunity to feel, amid popular acclamations and universal emotion, the imminent presence of God.

The town was divided in rivalry of its wayside altars; each quarter felt its reputation at stake. They were composed of moss and flowers, lilies, hortensias, geraniums and violets arranged in the form of a cross, or ingeniously combined in pious designs of

a more complicated nature. All the gardens and groves were ruthlessly despoiled on their account. The finest one was always promoted to the terrace overshadowed by ancient trees that overlooked the lake.

When the morning came every window was watching the daybreak, imploring heaven for favourable weather. The streets were bordered with pines and larches which the peasants, on the previous evening or the one before that, had brought from the mountain in their ox-carts. Wreaths hung upon ribbons were thrown across the street like light cables above a stream, so that one walked about under hundreds of improvised triumphal arches. Here and there, the better to adorn the house fronts, some one had set out a table covered with a white cloth bearing pictures, vases, statuettes with a lamp, and had made ready baskets of roses for the refreshment of the angel battalion. In the poorest alleys the good wives set forth before their houses all their precious possessions, even to daguerreotypes of relatives, or their most artistically decorated caps, the better to honour the passing of the Holy Sacrament. Thus the entire town adorned itself, like a bride for her marriage.

Every one gathered before the church; the confraternities in costume with their banners, the brass band, their well polished instruments shining in the sunlight, the school children, girls and boys, the very smallest of them waving banners and all the population massed behind these official groups, all drawn

up in good order. Then, upon the pavement before the church slowly advanced the sacred procession, while all the bells rang together; angels with wings of silver paper strewing the way with flower-petals drawn from little baskets suspended from their necks, clerks and sacristans in red cassocks, swinging censers whence arose blue smoke and a spicy odour, surpliced priests, canons in ermine rochets, and finally, upon a dais the colour of pure gold, or of ripe wheat, its four corners decorated with tufts of white plumes, escorted by four black-coated notables holding its cords, came Monsignor arrayed in a golden chasuble and bearing upon his breast the great golden monstrance.

It was a solemn moment, and yet there was one even more impressive. After having traversed the entire town, the procession would draw up for the last benediction upon the open place that forms a terrace above the lake, upheld by the walls of an ancient fortress. It would be near noon. The rays of the sun, falling directly upon the lake, were mirrored back, brightening all the colours, and flashing out in stars from every fleck of gold. Around the flower-decked altar the various bands were grouped, their standards all unfurled. Around these stood the soldiers in a large circle, the troops taking part for the last time in a religious ceremonial. They closed up, and at the command *genou terre!* they fell upon one knee, the officers waved their swords, and the clarions sounded loudly over all the fields. Many an

old woman wept with joy as she prostrated herself, needing to see nothing more to know that God was there. Yet there was more; a priest, mounting upon a stool, drew the monstrance from its flower-decked niche and handed it to Monsignor, and the august officiant, lifting it high in air, traced above the great congregation the sign of the cross. The tremor with which I was at that moment shaken thrilled through the entire crowd, a great wave of emotion, such as reveals to a whole people that they are one in faith.

When I went home in my school-boy uniform I was still all a-thrill. Mother was waiting for me. She perceived what I had just been experiencing, and I saw tears rush to her eyes as she proudly kissed me. She, sacrificing herself, had not witnessed the ceremony. Some one must take care of the house and prepare for the guests who always came to us on that day. But she had come out and knelt before the door, hidden by the pines, when the procession went by. I had seen her through the branches. For a short moment she had united Mary's part with that of Martha.

Father presently came home, warm and tired. He had had the honour of being chosen to hold one of the cords of the dais, and though he was bald, he had remained bareheaded, at the risk of a sunstroke.

"Dear wife!" he said simply, pressing mother to his heart. He had never given expression to his love

for her before me, and that is why I remember this. He too was stirred with high enthusiasm.

Then came grandfather, smiling, spruce, his frock coat buttoned awry and his black hat a little on one side, but except for these minor matters dressed with almost irreproachable care.

"Well!" mother asked him in gentle triumph, "were you there this time?"

It appeared that in former years he had gone out for a walk and had not returned before evening. I had already perceived, from a thousand slight indications, that there was not absolute agreement in religious matters in our house and that the subject was usually avoided. Grandfather could not repress the little sardonic laugh which he seldom bestowed upon my mother:

"Superb, superb!" he said. "One might have thought oneself at the festival of the sun. The pagans could not have done it better."

Mother's face crimsoned. She turned and sent me away on some pretext of an errand. As I was going I heard my father's clear voice:

"I beg you not to jest upon this subject before the children."

And the sarcastic voice replying:

"But I am not jesting."

In the street the nearest extemporised altar was already lying on the ground, like the useless shell of a firework. Everything had disappeared but the

scaffoldings, crosses of flowers, moss. Candelabra had been hastily put under cover because of the threatening rain, for clouds had suddenly overspread the sky, and also because every one had gone home to dinner. My enthusiasm had fallen too, beneath a word of doubt.

At the Feast of the Epiphany every one had to imitate the acts of the king who had been designated by the bean. If he drank every one cried, "The king drinks," and each one seized his glass. If the king began to laugh every one burst into laughter. Ought not a king to know when one should laugh and when he should keep his face straight?

III

THE ENEMIES

THERE was one Saturday evening, I remember. . . .

I can not fix the precise date, but I know it must have been a Saturday because on coming home from school I met at the door Oui-oui, shaking his head, and Zeez Million counting the amount of her interest, on her open palm.

Saturday was the day for the poor. We usually watched the procession under shelter of a closed window, for Aunt Deen, who was a stickler for class distinctions, prudently kept us shielded from their verminous contact. Zeez, or Louise, was a crazy woman to whom was regularly given every week the modest subsidy of fifty centimes, which she called her interest. Insanity did not affect her exactions: a new servant, not sufficiently instructed having insulted her by doling out two sous, had received back the inadequate money in her face. Her reason had been affected by the expectation of a large prize in the lottery. She now spoke only of millions and the name had stuck by her.

As for Yes-yes, he owed the soubriquet to his nodding head, the weight of which he could ill sustain,

and which incessantly wagged up and down like those articulated animals exhibited at bazars, their motions extolled by artful merchants by way of increasing their price. My sister Mélanie and I had incurred his wrath, under memorable circumstances. Mélanie having read in the gospels that a glass of water given to the poor would be paid back a hundred fold, conceived the idea of offering one to Oui-oui. In the goodness of her heart, she was even willing to let me participate in her beneficence. I held the caraffe, ready to offer a second draught. But he considered our gift an insult. Grandfather, when he heard of our ill-starred effort, completed our discomfiture:

"Offering water to that drunkard! He would rather never wash again than touch water."

And in our presence he tendered to Oui-oui a glass of red wine, which was swallowed at a draught, followed by a second and a third till the entire bottle was gone. If grandfather was to receive back *his* offering a hundred fold, his thirst would be copiously quenched in the celestial kingdom.

Whenever grandfather, going out for his daily walk, met beggars at the door, he would desire that bread and not money should be given them.

"Money is immoral," he would insist. "Let us share our bread with these good folk."

I could not understand how money could be immoral. And we always found at the foot of the stone columns, broken into bits, all the bread that had

been given, the poor having received it with contempt.

It must have been a Saturday in June. It was still broad day, though it was past seven o'clock when I came back to the house, and on the edge of the garden there was still a haycock which Tem Bossette must have mown, taking plenty of time. I just muttered, "How d'ye do, Yes-yes; how d'ye do, Zeez," without so much as waiting for their reply; did not close the door which they had left open, and slipped into the passage that led to the kitchen, for I had lingered on the way home from school to play with some schoolmates in a narrow street that we called "behind the walls," because it bordered a row of houses shut in like fortresses. I had no quarrel with this unsocial way of shutting every one out, though I preferred such fences or hedges as permit one to satisfy his curiosity, and do not so abruptly shut off the view; but grandfather, when he passed that way, never concealed his disgust. "The earth is for everybody, and they mew her up as if they feared she would run away!"

He spoke of it as of a living person. Except for our house I should have been quite willing to do away with all enclosures. Did not the earth belong to me?

"Behind the walls" we used to have great games of marbles in the very middle of the street, certain of not being disturbed. If a chance cart should enter the street, the driver, held up by our protests,

would wait patiently until we had finished our game, sometimes he would even interest himself in the process; after which he would go on his way. Nobody was in a hurry in those days. At the present time that road is the Boulevard of the Constitution, and one has to look out for automobiles. I have no idea where children go to play now-a-days.

My haste was not due to fear of being scolded for being late. I was sure that no one had so much as thought of me. But merely by approaching the gate I had felt the strange uneasiness which at that time seemed to pervade the house like some formal guest whose presence makes every one feel ill at ease. Domestic tragedies make their approach felt long in advance by signs somewhat like those of a coming storm: a breathless atmosphere, intermittent showers of tears, the distant murmur of recriminations and laments. There was electricity in the air. My mother, who never failed to light her blessed candle as soon as thunder began to growl, was praying more often than ever, and I could see that she was anxious, for her pure eyes could never hide anything. Aunt Deen tore up and down stairs with feverish, almost warlike, ardour, inflamed with a rage that gave her an invincible strength, amazing The Hanged, and making those spiders that thought themselves just beyond reach suffer the ruthlessly avenging wolf's head. She was continually uttering threats against invisible enemies. Ah! the wretches! They would soon know with whom they had to deal! "They"

were certainly getting vigorous castigation in advance. Even our father, generally so self-controlled, appeared absorbed. At table he would sometimes throw back his head as if to drive away troublesome thoughts. And more than once I had perceived him conversing in a low voice with our mother, giving her documents on blue paper to read, the words of which I did not understand. Every one was on the alert for something to happen, perhaps a bulletin of victory or of disaster, such as comes to a country where the armies are on the frontier.

Alone among these secret parleyings, these evident anxieties, grandfather maintained the most complete indifference. Evidently the approaching event was no affair of his. He played the violin, smoked his pipe, consulted his barometer, inspected the sky, predicted the weather, as if nothing could be more important, and he went regularly for his walk. Nothing was changing, nothing could change for him except the clouds across the sun. As for things of earth, they were utterly without importance.

Once father attempted to ask his opinion, or present to him the peril of a situation which I could not in the least understand. His words were supplicating, moving, pathetic, yet full of a respect which in no degree lessened their emphasis. Lying on the floor with my school book I lost nothing of the conversation, instead of studying my lesson.

But I could catch only detached words which by degrees filled me with terror: "careless administration," "responsibility," "mortgage," "sentence," "total ruin," "auction," and at last the terrifying conclusion, like the blow of a cane on my head.

"Then we must leave the house?"

Leave the house! I can still see grandfather lifting his arm wearily, as if to drive away a fly, letting it fall again as he replied with a great gentleness which at first deceived me as to his thought:

"Oh, as far as I am concerned, it's all one whether we live in this house or in another"; adding with his everlasting little laugh:

"Ha, ha! when one hires a house one can ask for repairs. In one's own house one never gets any."

At that moment father perceived me. His eyes were so dreadful that I was terrified and broke out into gooseflesh; but he simply said, without raising his voice:

"Run away, child. This is no place for you."

I ran away, stupefied with a gentleness that was in such contrast with his face. Now I recognise it as a witness to his tremendous mastery of himself. I rushed out into the garden, carrying, like a bomb under my arm, the formidable utterance, *Whether we live in this house or another.* The idea had never occurred to me, could never have come to me, that we could live in another house. I felt as if I had been witnessing a sacrilege, but at the same time the

sacrilege found harbour in my brain because it had had no immediate sanction, had been accompanied by no solemnity, was like any indifferent act, like an act of no consequence at all. Was it possible that such words could have been uttered as a mere aside, negligently, even smilingly!

For the first time my notions of life were turned topsy-turvey. I confided my bewilderment to Tem Bossette, who was ruminating, leaning upon the handle of his spade. He lent me a complaisant ear, but took the opportunity to impart to me a bit of his personal history:

"I had a son in the hospital. When I saw that he was going to die, I rolled him up in a quilt and went away with my bundle. He died at home."

I could not grasp the immediate applicability of his story, which he had told proudly, as if recalling an act of heroism. He shortly condescended to explain:

"It's your lawsuit that is worrying them."

Our lawsuit? We had a lawsuit? I had no idea what it was, and though I felt shame for my ignorance I asked the vinedresser:

"What is a lawsuit?"

He scratched his nose, no doubt in search of a definition.

"It's something about justice. One loses, one wins, just as it happens. But when one loses it's a great bother. On account of the sheriffs, who walk into your house as into a mill."

The sheriffs were to walk into our house as into a mill! In an instant I pictured them under the guise of gigantic insects, enormous mole crickets swarming into the garden through the breach made by the chestnut tree, advancing in serried ranks to invest the house. I was particularly afraid of mole-crickets, which have a long clammy body and two antennæ on the head, and enjoy a detestable reputation in agricultural circles: all sorts of misdeeds are attributed to them — they ravage whole garden beds. I had actually seen some crawling through the breach, and in the face of their invasion not all the arms manufactured by Tem Bossette sufficed to reassure me. I had turned tail, so to speak, upon my riding pole.

"It's all Monsieur's fault," concluded the labourer, upon whose heart the affair hung heavy. "But what will you have? He doesn't care for anything, and when one doesn't care for anything nothing goes right. It's lucky there's Master Michael."

Then, on one side there were the mole-crickets and on the other there was my father. A fearsome battle was to take place of which the house was the stake. And during the battle grandfather, indifferent, would be looking in the air, according to his custom, to see which way the wind blew. Up to that time I had supposed that, like the sluggard kings, he had nothing to do, but behold, he could bring about catastrophes! With one word he could close chapels, be-

little ancestral portraits, and above all, it was quite the same to him to live in one house as in another! Why not in a *roulotte*, one of those waggon houses overflowing with bronzed gipsies, such as I had seen passing the gate, to the great terror of Aunt Deen, who used to call us in hastily, and give orders to bolt all the doors and look after the vegetables and fruits.

I was going in, greatly depressed by this conversation when I ran against Aunt Deen herself, whose assistance had been invoked by The Hanged for some arduous task requiring nerve and muscle.

"The lawsuit," I cried, by way of relieving my mind. She stopped short.

"Who has been talking to you?"

"Tem Bossette."

"That fellow must be sent away. Beatrix and Pachoux will have to do by themselves."

She did not count herself. She simply called Beatrix by his right name.

Did she perceive from my tone or my face the inward tragedy through which I was passing? She shook me, laughing:

"Child, when your father is here, there is never anything to be afraid of — do you hear?"

And I was at once consoled.

She was already hastening after the labourer with a ball of red string in her hand which Mariette had doubtless refused to intrust to him. As she went she

tossed her head proudly, like a horse that snuffs the wind and I heard her muttering to herself.

"Well, I declare, if that isn't the last drop!"

By what signs, that Saturday evening, did I discern that the battle had been fought, that we were only waiting to learn the result? In the kitchen there was no Mariette over the stove. She was debating, vehemently, with Philomena, the waitress, who was carrying the soup tureen all awry, at great risk of spilling its contents, and with my old friend Tem, redder even than usual, who was doing his best to reassure the household by a word of prophecy.

"No, no, things will go well. To begin with, for my part, I will not leave the garden."

As soon as they saw me there was silence, and Mariette quickly recovered her usual coolness and began to scold me.

"You are late, Master Francis. The second bell has rung. You will be scolded." And to Philomena:

"Why are you standing there like a stock?"

Thus were we dispersed. I was counting upon meeting Aunt Deen in the vestibule before the dining-room; she was always the last to come to table because on the way she would find thirty-six different things to be begun or finished, and dash upstairs and down an indefinite number of times. My tactics succeeded. To forestall inquiry I took the offensive:

"What about the lawsuit?"

"Hush; we are waiting to hear."

"To hear what?"

"It is being decided to-day in the Court."

She uttered the words "The Court" with instructive stateliness, that reminded me of the Court of the Emperor Charlemagne, in my history book. A grand personage, a king with a golden crown on his head and wearing a golden chasuble like Monsignor the bishop in the procession, was concerning himself with our matter. It was awe-inspiring but flattering.

Under Aunt Deen's shadow I slipped into my seat, endeavouring to put on a natural air. In the spirit of good fellowship my brothers and sisters refrained from calling attention to my arrival, so that I could swallow my soup without being noticed. Usually our mother came into the dining-room before us, to serve the soup. Philomena's loquacity had interfered with this preliminary operation and I reaped the benefit of it. In fact, my parents paid not the slightest attention to me, from which I could infer that something was going on. I hastily gulped down my food, and my plate emptied, I cast a comprehensive glance around the table.

In the seat of honour, grandfather, the reigning king, was leaning over the table in order to drop no soup upon his beard, the precaution evidently quite absorbing him. I should learn nothing from him; nor anything more from my father, who commanded

the table from one of the corners, and whose glance made me drop my eyes, for I could see distinctly that he was aware of my fault. After having inquired of one another as to his occupations during the day, he tried to make the conversation general. But he was almost the only one who spoke. His calm, his cheerfulness, soon completely restored the confidence which two or three spoonfuls of warm soup had already begun to awaken in me. Aunt Deen, who could not remain inactive during the intervals of the service, was busying herself in advance by mixing the salad, which she considered her special function, although there had often been some talk of withdrawing it from her because of her prodigality in the matter of vinegar. She tossed the green leaves and muttered vague exorcisms against bad luck. My sister Louise was teasing the little priest, the absent-minded Stephen, whom one might serve indefinitely with the same dish. But Bernard and Mélanie, the two eldest, often turned their eyes in one direction, and mine followed them: they were looking at our mother and our mother was looking at our father, upon whom in this hour all our safety seemed to depend.

The lamp had been lighted but it was not yet dark out of doors. Only the trees seemed to draw nearer, their branches to grow thicker and to cast a deeper shadow. Through the open windows a fresh breeze came from the garden, bringing on its wings pell-mell, the odour of flowers, and a cloud of night-

moths, which, attracted by the light, wheeled about under the lamp shade. I watched their flight, at times more deeply interested in them than in the disturbed expression of the faces around the table.

The meal was drawing to a close; the dessert was already being served. I had begun to think that nothing was going to happen. Suddenly Mariette rushed into the dining-room, a telegram in her hand. She had not waited to put it on a tray, she had not given it to the maid who served at table, but brought it in person just as she had received it from the postman. She, too, scented important news in the air, and would learn what it was without delay.

"It is for Monsieur Rambert," she said.

She passed by grandfather's place, and crossed the entire length of the room, as if she was but doing her duty in handing the blue paper to father, who was on the side toward the windows. Father took it from her, but handed it at once to the actual addressee.

"Do you want it?" he asked.

"Oh, no thank you," said grandfather with his little laugh. "Open it yourself."

Nevertheless I caught him casting a quick, alert glance upon the telegram. His little laugh at once recalled to my mind a rattle which had been taken away from me because it disturbed everybody. That little laugh was the last sound. An almost solemn silence ensued, so complete that I could hear the tearing of the envelope. How could father open it with

so little impatience? I imagined myself opening it in his place, crr — crr . . . it was done. All eyes converged upon the deliberate motions of his two hands — all except those of grandfather, who quite as peacefully removed the crust from a bit of cheese, and seemed to take pleasure in the trifling task. Father felt our anxiety and doubtless wished to relieve it at all hazards; instead of reading he raised his eyes to us.

"Go on eating," he said. "It does not concern you."

Then turning to the cook who had remained behind his chair, leaning over like an interrogation point:

"Thank you, Mariette, you may go."

She went, vexed, knowing nothing, but sent in Philomena who learned no more than she.

Finally my father read. Deliberate as he had been in the preliminaries he was quick enough in reading. He must have taken in the whole at a glance. He was already putting the telegram in his pocket without a word, without the movement of a muscle, when he looked around the table, and under his gaze we bent our eyes upon our plates.

"Come, come, children!" he exclaimed almost gaily. "It is still light. Make haste to finish your dessert and run play in the garden."

He spoke in his usual tone, at once cheery and commanding. It was so simple that for a moment our mother quite brightened up. I saw that as I

raised my head, but it was only for a moment, like the afterglow upon the mountain tops after sunset. Then the shadow again swept over her face, and I even saw in her eyes two water drops that glistened and disappeared without falling. She had understood, and after her and by her I understood, too. The mysterious Court had decided against us. The lawsuit, the terrible lawsuit, was lost.

We were all in consternation without knowing precisely why; we had felt the wind of defeat pass over us.

Still, our father manifested no trouble, no sadness, and grandfather after his gruyère was dipping his biscuit in his wine, as he particularly liked to do because of his teeth, which were bad. He seemed to have paid no attention to the affair of the telegram. The nerve of the one amazed me as much as the aloofness of the other. By different ways they had reached the same calmness. As for Aunt Deen, she was biting viciously into a peach which was unripe and crackled.

We left the table and went into the garden into which darkness was stealthily creeping. I tried to linger behind, but was drawn along by my sister Mélanie; she divined that our parents wished to talk by themselves.

I could find no pleasure in any play, and I was soon flocking by myself, my imagination revelling over the approaching ruin. "They" were driving us from our house as the angel drove Adam and Eve

out of Eden. "They" were coming into our house as into a mill. "They" were dividing our treasures among themselves as the Greeks divided the spoils of the Trojans. "They?" Who? Aunt Deen's "they"; I knew no more than that. And in this catastrophe one remark kept coming back to me, incomprehensible, terrifying, and yet not to be put away: *What's the difference whether one lives in one house or in another?*

These words of my grandfather, revolting and at the same time stupefying, almost mesmerized me by their audacity, almost made me giddy. How could one consent to abandon his house without defending it to his utmost ability? In my heart I cried to arms. By way of acting out what was going on within me, I seized one of Tem Bossette's swords, bestrode my favourite pole, and notwithstanding the rapid approach of darkness, extinguishing the last rays of twilight, of which I was greatly in dread, I rushed at a gallop to the very top of the garden, to the chestnut grove, to the breach in the wall. The shadow of night had already entered by it, and after it all the shadows. They were creeping along, climbing the trees, swarming over the paths, filling the clumps of trees. There was a whole army of them. They were the mole-crickets, giant mole-crickets, the enemies of the house. With all my might I tried to scatter them to right and left with great sword thrusts. But I met nothing, and that was the worst

of it. Then, in desperation, I took to my heels. I was conquered.

It was a comfort to hear a voice coming my way, my mother's voice calling,

"François, François!"

That call saved my honour; my hasty return ceased to be a flight.

My bedroom, the vast proportions of which distressed me, but which happily I shared with Bernard and Stephen, was near our mother's chamber. It was long before I could sleep. Beneath the door of communication I could perceive a streak of light. The lamp must have burned very late and I could hear the alternating sound of two carefully subdued voices,— my father's and my mother's voices. With all calmness the destiny of the family was being discussed close beside me.

IV

THE TREATY

WHEN one is a child one imagines that events are going to rush one upon another like the two opposite camps of a game of prison-bars. The next morning I expected something extraordinary to happen, the first result of which would be a holiday from school. Surely no one would work when the house was threatened! I was astonished on being called at the usual hour, when I was settling myself to make up my lost sleep, and sent to school just as usual. Stephen, always absent minded and absorbed in his prayers, had noticed nothing. But Bernard, the eldest, appeared to me to lack his usual high spirits; no doubt he considered me too young to share his dejection. None of us exchanged any confidences on the way to school.

This silence was the beginning of forgetting. I soon recovered from the alarm of the preceding evening, and very soon, as we continued to live in the house, I concluded that our enemies had beat an unexpected retreat.

"*They* wouldn't dare," Aunt Deen had declared.

Nevertheless, a few days later, happening to be in mother's room, she received a visit from her dress-

maker, a maiden of a certain age with mahogany coloured hair, such as I have never seen on any other head. Mother excused herself for having summoned her for so small a matter, simply a making-over, and not a new gown.

"When one has seven children," she added prettily, "one must be reasonable. And besides I am no longer very young."

"Madame is always young and beautiful," protested the artist.

From my corner I considered this protest misplaced. Neither the age nor the face of my mother belonged to this lady of the mahogany hair, but well and duly to me and my brothers and sisters. Whether she was pretty or ugly, young or old, concerned us alone.

"So," concluded my mother, "here is a gown which you can easily alter a little. You are so clever."

"Madame has worn it a good deal already."

"Precisely, I am attached to it."

This time I thought the dressmaker was right, in putting on a disdainful air as she accepted the work so unworthy of her. Without question the gown in question had been often worn.

At the moment I saw no connection between this episode and our domestic drama. My mother would always be beautiful enough, and clothes could make no difference. Family discussions, however, usually took place in the octagon parlour, which could only

be entered by passing through our bedroom. It was quite isolated, and one could be sure of not being interrupted. We hardly ever went there except for our music lessons, since the cupboard chapel had been put out of commission.

It was there that I had lost my faith in the Christmas miracle. It is true that grandfather's dry laugh, whenever the descent of the little Jesus was anticipated, had prepared me for incredulity. The morning of the festival day desired and expected by all children, we used to find in this room a pine tree, its branches bent down under the weight of toys, and lighted up by blue and pink candles. At the foot of the tree a wax baby would be lying upon straw, holding out to us his little arms. The ox and the ass were there, too, but the child was larger than they. Their smaller proportions simply put them in their proper place of subordination. Without seeking to penetrate the mystery I always supposed that the tree grew there of itself during the night, with all the strange fruits, which were quite enough to distract my curiosity. But on the night of December 24, lying awake from curiosity, I saw my father and mother pass through the room, walking on tiptoe, only in old houses there are always planks that cry out and betray the presence of people. It even happens that they cry out when no one is there, as if they were supporting invisible persons, the steps of all those who had trodden upon them while living. My parents were laden with all

sorts of packages. From that time I understood their collaboration with the little Jesus.

Now, I again believe in the miracle, though like Jesus himself it descended from heaven upon the earth. It was a miracle of love.

How did our father and mother manage to realise at one time all the dreams of our excited imaginations and distribute to each one the paradisaical things that he longed for? How, above all, did they manage to diminish nothing from the divine generosity which they represented during the sorrowful times that we were soon to know? My wonder never ceases when I see, on Christmas day, in the quarters where the poor live, children running about with their hands full of gifts. They are only cheap little toys, but they bear in themselves the virtue of a miracle. . . .

Of the secret consultations in the music room, notwithstanding its remarkable acoustic properties, I could hear nothing. Neither of the two spoke above a low murmur: they were always of one mind. Yet I divined that they were talking of the lawsuit. Something serious was lurking in the darkness. Preparations were being made to repel the enemy. And I wondered why the enemy did not make his appearance.

One morning — it was a Thursday — as we came home for the midday breakfast, my brothers and I, what was our stupefaction, our horror, on perceiving on one of the stone columns into which the en-

trance gates were set, an enormous bill, which bore the outrageous inscription:

VILLA FOR SALE

We looked at one another, all alike indignant.

"It's an insult!" exclaimed Bernard, who already had a sense of military honour.

"No, it's a mistake," affirmed Stephen, with unbounded amazement.

Absent-minded and unobservant, he had not for one moment reflected upon the trifling incidents which Bernard and I had been observing, and which, inspiring us with a holy horror, had prepared us for this catastrophe.

We should not have felt more overcome with shame if we had all three been slapped in the face. Bernard, the boldest of us, tried to tear down the bill, but it was glued fast and resisted the attempt. Like a reinforcing army we rushed into the besieged house, which I expected to find full of mole-crickets. The first person we met was Aunt Deen, gesticulating and talking to herself. We had hardly opened our lips when she perceived our agitation and at once her fury put ours into the shade.

"Yes, *they* want to rob us of everything! *They* propose to take possession of our property. I would rather have died than live to see this."

On her lips the word *property* took on a solemn grandeur. Then *they* had passed through the

breach; *they* were advancing upon us in serried ranks. Beyond this assurance it was needless to expect anything more intelligible from Aunt Deen.

We turned for further explanation to grandfather, coming in from his walk. He waved us off with a gesture of superb indifference; he seemed to us to be soaring in a region far above our agitations. Had he not declared that it was all one to him whether he lived in one house or another? He had been out for a walk on this fine July morning, when the whole sunny country-side seemed swimming in light; he looked healthy, radiant; why should he permit us to spoil his pleasure by inopportune remarks? On the contrary he proposed to share some of his pleasure with us.

"I love this good summer sun," he said. "And no one can rob us of it."

His remark was not calculated to quiet our alarm. Its singularity struck me: in such a moment as this, when all our combative energies were not enough to resist the danger that hung over us, he would draw our attention to a simple source of happiness which had no lawful owner and was beyond attack. When one is a child one never thinks that the sun is something he may enjoy.

Mother was clasping my two elder sisters in her arms, trying to console them and not succeeding, for she shared their sorrow. At her feet the two little ones, Nicola and Jamie, were lamenting themselves indiscriminately. Imagine the effect upon us of this

weeping group! Even Louise, the laughing Louise, was abandoning herself to tears.

"Here comes your father," suddenly exclaimed mamma. "Stop crying, I beg of you. He has trouble enough already."

She had been the first to hear his step. The effect of her words was instantaneous. We all controlled ourselves as quickly as we could, and went down to the dining-room with faces in good order.

At table The Father began to be absorbed in his thoughts, the course of which we followed. We used to call him *the father* among ourselves, as we used to say *the house.* Did he see the anxiety in all those faces turned toward him? Did he read in our eyes the dishonouring inscription, *Villa for sale?* He looked us full in the face one by one and his frank smile reassured us. Come! He still had his air as of the chief who commands. We had the feeling that he could not consent to such a downfall. Peace and appetite returned to us at the same time, and seldom was luncheon more gay than this one. We enjoyed the relief to our strained nerves, under the shelter of that protecting strength.

After the meal, while my brothers, whose studies were already of importance, completed a task, I ran into the garden; the afternoon was mine. The figure of Tem Bossette emerged from the vines. I went to him. He was tying the too luxuriant branches to poles with bands of straw, but he asked nothing better than to interrupt his work which, to judge

by the number of branches already tied, was not making much headway. An empty bottle at his feet bore witness to the obstinate struggle against the heat which he had maintained.

He evidently saw my approach with satisfaction. I could hear from a distance his hoarse voice muttering to himself like Aunt Deen. At a later time I understood better the secret reason of his indignation. He was acknowledging to himself, not being as stupid as Mimi Pachoux, his rival, insisted, that his whims and his drink habits would make him of no use anywhere else; his destiny was closely allied with the destiny of the house. So he lost none of his rage and did not cease to lift up his head, his great pumpkin shaped head, against the reigning king, whose idleness, whose home and foreign politics and above all, whose financial condition he never ceased to deplore. As soon as I was near enough to hear him, he put into words the griefs which were obscurely struggling within him:

"You have read the bill, Master Francis?"

"To be sure I have read it."

And I added, bitter with family pride,

"What is that to you?"

The question suffocated him. His eyes started from his head. "To me? To me?" he exclaimed, foaming at the mouth with fury.

The ancient habit of respect recalled him to himself, and in a lamentable tone he began to set forth his own claim to a part in the family sorrows.

"I have chopped wood here for forty years (he exaggerated everything). It was I who planted these vines and this garden."

As a matter of fact there was not much to be proud of in that. Our garden sometimes looked like a field and sometimes like a forest, and the prematurely yellowed leaves of the vines revealed a chlorotic condition which would doubtless have been the better for a vigorous medication. But grandfather and his gardener were of one mind in distrusting medicines, as well for plants as for people.

"Where should I go if I left you?" Tem continued frankly. "I might as well throw myself into the water and done with it."

It would have been his only opportunity to take a good drink of it. Would it then be necessary henceforth to watch him, too? — as if we hadn't enough with the tiresome propensity of The Hanged? I confess, however, that I did not take this threat very seriously. I had indeed no difficulty in convincing Tem of the advantage of continuing to live. Then his lamentation took another turn.

"What need had Monsieur (that was grandfather) to plunge into all those schemes? Paving the town, and dealing in slates, and agricultural credit. Agricultural credit! As if any one ever paid when you gave them credit. What would be the use of credit, then, if you had to pay in the end like any one else? Not to speak of other bad luck here and

there, when all he needs is the sun and the fresh air. Won't do to undertake to manage things when the third or the quarter is all the same to one. The thing is to keep quiet in a corner with one's income and let other folks work for you. If it were Monsieur Michel, that's another pair of sleeves; Monsieur Michel, that's all right, he's one who understands governing things. With him there's nothing to fear, everything goes as if on wheels. But what's to be done when the other won't see it?"

I began confusedly to understand that grandfather's philanthropic enterprises and the unfortunate results of his administration were ending in the ruin of us all. Tem's long harangue, uttered without interruption, had at once comforted him and made him thirsty. He gazed upon the empty bottle that lay at the foot of a vine and constituted his sole supply for the day. Taking advantage of the respite, I tried to understand more about our discomfiture.

"But why should the house be sold?"

"Why, it's the lawsuit. When you lose a lawsuit they seize you, they arrest you, they strangle you, they turn you out of doors, they take possession of your house, and you are good for nothing but to throw to the dogs."

This deplorable picture was not calculated to reassure me. And far from being sorry for us, Tem, perceiving my grandfather who was majestically com-

ing down the garden walk, cheerful, erect, flourishing his cane, grew doubly irritated with him, as the cause of all the trouble.

"All right — all right! When one has got himself into a mess he is prosecuted, arrested, condemned. No good to embrace every one like a brother when one has good land to look after. One has bother enough with the land — there are plenty of folk to prowl about it. Just look at him! He doesn't even see us — it's all the same to him — everything's all the same to him."

As a general thing Tem had no desire to be observed. Now he was making a great racket to attract attention and not succeeding. This failure completed his disgust — his failure combined, I think, with the prospect of finishing the afternoon without a drink. He deliberately laid down the straw of which he made his ligatures, and deserting his post he abandoned me into the bargain.

"I won't see it! I won't see it!" he exclaimed as he went, irritated and discouraged.

See what? The invasion of the mole-crickets? Neither did I want to see it.

I followed the deserter as far as the gate, where I read the bill three or four times over the better to understand the extent of our disaster, and then came slowly back. What could I do now? My horses — the poles — my wooden sword, my plays, were no longer anything to me. For the first time in my life, perhaps, I let my arms hang useless by my sides. By

this feeling of the vanity of all things I was being born into grief. I was learning to separate myself from things. Since that moment I have always felt the pang of separation as soon as I see it coming and long before it actually reaches me.

I went back to the garden and threw myself down in the long grass which Tem had neglected to mow, and there I lay, face downward, I know not how long. All the garden enveloped me in perfume, and I breathed the garden. The house, from its open windows, looked at me across the grass, and I wept for the house. The strength of my love for the house had been as unknown to me as my own heart.

It was a warm, still summer afternoon, full of the hum of insects in the sunshine. Little by little I felt myself drowned in a soft sweetness, as a fly is drowned in honey. And little by little I became happy in spite of my pain. Later I came to know that debasing consolation that comes to us from the beauty of the day, when death has passed that way.

I fell asleep at last, like a baby in its tears. When I awoke evening had come into the garden, noiselessly, and was hiding under the trees. I got up and ran to seek it in the chestnut grove. The dinner bell rang and I turned back. A quantity of things that I had never noticed before impressed themselves upon my mind: the tone of the bell, the rosy tint of the sky between the branches, the long sprays of clematis drooping from the balcony, the lack of symmetry in the windows, and even the creaking of the

door as I pushed it open, though it must always have creaked just so. With fierce ardour I was discovering all that I was about to lose.

We could never get used to seeing without indignation, on returning from school, the ill-omened bill that dishonoured the entrance. Tem Bossette had not returned; we learned that he was drinking himself drunk in all the wine-shops. Mimi Pachoux was working elsewhere; the ship was leaking at every joint and the crew was escaping. Only the long, woe-begone face of The Hanged occasionally showed itself here and there like a sign of distress, or an abhorrent symbol of the evil fate which was pursuing us.

"He is faithful," Aunt Deen would say, overshadowing him with her protection and aiding him in his work.

More faithful than he, and keeping vigilant guard over the menaced home, she met us at the gate one day in an unusual state of agitation.

"I was watching for you, children," she said, "to warn you."

What was going on now? We were not kept long in ignorance.

"A wretch has come, a wretch from Paris (that was an aggravating circumstance, for nothing good could come out of that notorious Babylon, corrupt as it was and fit only for the flames), who has taken upon himself to go through every part of the house,

from cellar to garret. Your father is going with him. I can't imagine how he can keep from throwing him out of window. He must have a patience quite beyond me!"

We were thunderstruck. A stranger dared to come into our house! And our father,— The Father — consented to escort him through it! Aunt Deen might well be terrified: the laws of the universe were turned upside down. As we followed her dejectedly into the house, with hanging heads and shame-flushed cheeks, we came upon this visitor descending the stairs on his way to the kitchen. He was loudly criticising, laying his plans, estimating the size of the rooms, with manifold gesticulations, as if already building a house of his own on the ruins of ours.

"The stairs are too narrow. The kitchen is out of proportion to the other rooms; I shall convert it into a drawing-room."

My father was showing him about politely, though without alacrity, preserving a calm and distant manner that checked the loquacity of the other when he turned to him, the better to set forth his plans. We went straight up to mother's room as to our natural refuge. Our mother, who was kneeling at her faldstool, rose when she heard us coming. Her emotion appeared in her face.

"God will protect us," she said.

When she uttered the name of God she was, as it were, illumined. At that moment I understood what

it is to hate the foreigner — the invader. My father's subordination, my mother's tears, and our house trodden, judged, appraised, by a stranger — those are sights that I can never forget. Later, when I read in my History of France that the Allies had crossed the frontiers in 1814 and 1815, and had come and encamped in our capital, when I learned that the Prussians had torn Alsace and Lorraine from us, like a part of our very flesh, I had no difficulty in giving material form to those past woes; I could most distinctly see that gentleman who went from top to bottom of our house as if he were at home.

"Why did you bow to him?" Aunt Deen asked grandfather, who came in with his usual deliberate indifference.

"I am polite to every one."

"One doesn't compound with the enemy."

How could our father, who was not generally considered easy-going, have endured this outrage without faltering? He was in charge of our safety, and the exercise of power imposes obligations which irresponsible folk are apt to neglect. His good humour amazed us also on another occasion. One day at table he suddenly said to mamma:

"Do you know what news is going about the town?"

"I have seen no one."

"They say we are leaving town; the house being

sold, we shall disappear. Our pride would never endure a less conspicuous establishment. And who do you suppose has spread the report? I give you a thousand guesses. But no, you have too much faith in human goodness. It is my beloved colleagues. They have discovered a practical method of sharing my practice among them. One after another my patients ask, 'Is it true that you are going away? Stay with us! What will become of us?' It is very touching. But I have reassured them."

He laughed,— the hearty laugh of a man accustomed to the fray. We were too young to perceive all the contempt and force that resounded in this victorious laugh, which in our indignation almost scandalised us. Especially Bernard and Louise, hasty and impressionable, protested vehemently against the odious implication, though indeed their opinion had not been asked. Our mother, even she, had blushed for the harm that had been devised against us, and which she herself would never have imagined. As for Aunt Deen, she doubled her fist at the enemy —" they " indeed had at last been discovered:

" Oh, the monsters! I'm not a bit surprised. It would be no more than they deserve if they were compelled to swallow all their own medicines."

Her aspiration moved grandfather to hilarity. Till then he had been passive, but he was too much the enemy of doctors not to relish his sister's prescription for vengeance.

It was she who, a few days later, told us of our deliverance. She had placed herself outside of the gate, like an advanced sentinel, and made to us from afar unintelligible signs, which as we drew near we interpreted unfavourably. Assuredly the invader had taken possession of the fortress. The house was sold. We had no longer a roof to shelter us. As Tem had prophesied, we were good for nothing but to be thrown to the dogs.

When we were within hearing distance she hailed us:

"Come quick, come quick! The house is ours! The house is ours!"

We rushed wildly forward.

"The bill isn't there," cried Bernard, who was ahead.

Only the marks of nails remained upon the pillar.

"Aha!" continued Aunt Deen's voice, bursting out in a triumphant cadence. "*They* thought they had it! But they won't get it!"

They were no longer the doctors, but the gentleman from Paris and other purchasers, who had appeared while we were in school. With uplifted arm she sketched the flight of the dispersed troop.

With a step that was rapid in spite of her years she led us to the music room where the family was assembled, with the exception of grandfather, who no doubt had made no change in his hour of walking, and who was probably ignorant of our salvation. Mariette followed us at a respectful distance.

Her long service gave her the right to a place in the procession.

Our mother, deeply moved, was caressing the hair of my two elder sisters, whom joy, like grief, had moved to tears. But I attached no importance to the tears of my sisters, which used to flow for nothing at all. My father standing, his hand upon the back of my mother's chair, was smiling. I had never seen his face so radiant, and through the window, behind the group, the sun was coming in like a distinguished guest.

"The bill isn't there," repeated Bernard without the usual greeting.

"Yes," said our father; "we shall keep the house."

And as our enthusiasm was about to burst forth, he added,

"You owe it to your mother and also to your Aunt Bernardine."

The latter, whose parchment cheeks would crimson for no reason but that some one spoke of her, while she kept neither her thoughts nor her property for herself, and daily robbed herself as a matter of course, stoutly refused all praise.

"How you talk, Michel! For nothing but a signature! You mustn't mislead these children."

Mother at once approved:

"She is right; it is your father who has saved us all."

And lowering her voice she turned to him, murmuring — but I heard her:

"Is not all that I have, yours?"

I paid little heed, I acknowledge, to this debate. Of course the saving of the house was due solely to our father. How could our mother and Aunt Deen have helped? It had been necessary to throw out the gentleman from Paris and the other invaders, as Ulysses on his return to Ithaca had thrown out the lovers. That was an exercise of strength which belonged only to a man. My notions of life were simple: the man governed, the woman's sole charge was of domestic matters. That Aunt Deen had her rights, however diminished, in the building that "they" were trying to get away from us I could never have understood, any more than I could understand what a dowry was, and how the consent of the wife was necessary to enable the husband to dispose of property.

Nevertheless I recalled the incident of the dressmaker. Mother had no doubt made some savings in the matter of clothes and turned them in. Does not every one make his contribution to the wars? I immediately slipped out of the room and came back bringing the savings bank in which I had been encouraged to drop such little sous as I received. I expected an ovation for the magnanimity of my sacrifice. Without a word I handed it to my father.

"What do you want me to do with it?" was all his response.

Somewhat abashed, being gazed upon by all present, I said, blushing furiously:

"It is for the house."

This time my father drew me to him and publicly gave me the *accolade* with the dazzling Order of the Day.

"This child will be our joy."

Thus the Emperor rewarded his marshals on the field of battle; nothing in history is surprising to one who has had a childhood like mine.

Coming in while the bell was ringing, grandfather was the last one to learn what had happened. Aunt Deen informed him in a fiery harangue. He heard her with interest but without emotion, his serenity all undisturbed. And when the heroic story was finished he nodded his head, vouchsafing merely the words of faint admiration:

"Well, well! so much the better!"

Things had been arranged with no help from him.

V.

THE ABDICATION

In the days that followed I came to understand by all sorts of small tokens, not to speak of the remarks of servants, that the house no longer belonged to grandfather, but to my parents, and that only a simple formality remained to be accomplished for the treaty to be final. Grandfather no longer having the responsibility — though in truth the responsibility had never weighed heavily upon him — had no desire to keep the honours of headship. More than once I heard father speaking to him to the following effect:

"I do not want anything to be changed — I want everything to be as it has always been — I want to take from you nothing but your cares."

"Oho!" grandfather would reply with his little laugh, "you are lucky if you know just what you want."

And he would run his fingers carelessly through his beard, as if nothing were worth any trouble. Still, a plan was simmering in his mind, of which we were speedily advised. When once he had hold of an idea nothing, neither entreaties nor protests,

would induce him to let it go. Aunt Deen's tumultuous reproaches, father's brief, clear-cut, unanswerable arguments, mother's entreaties,— he received them all with equal tranquillity of temper and heeded none of them. From his amiable and detached air one would have deemed him easily amenable to persuasion, if it had not been for his wicked little laugh which upset everything.

One fine morning we were all informed of his decision to give up the room with two windows which he occupied in the very heart of the house, which was vast, comfortable and easy to keep warm, and to take possession of what? — no one could have guessed — the tower chamber! This room had long been unoccupied, and all the winds of heaven blew through it. No sooner had he made known his intention than the entire household, after fruitless attempts to make him abandon his purpose, must needs bend every nerve to help him move without delay. Without waiting for any of us he was already leading the way to the staircase laden with the most precious of his possessions.

"Wait at least until we sweep, clean and dust," urged Aunt Deen, armed with the wolf's head.

"It's not worth while," he assured her. "One can live very comfortably with spiders and dust."

This scandal at least was avoided. Aunt Deen was ahead of him, and he was obliged to have a few minutes' patience, little as he liked it; after which he resolutely laid hold of the bannister, bearing his

barometer, violin case and pipes. Down he came again for his spy-glass. The rest of the removal did not interest him at all. His clothes, linen and furniture might follow him or not, as it happened. He showed his confidence in me by requesting me to carry a treatise on astronomy, a volume about cryptograms, the coloured illustrations of which I already knew, showing the principal species of mushrooms, and another work which from its title I believed to be a book of devotion: the "Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau"—I had almost forgotten the "Prophecies of Michel Nostradamus," and a collection of the "True Limping Messenger of Berne and Vevey," an almanac famous and precious from every point of view, but chiefly for its meteorological bulletins. For grandfather was greatly interested in the condition of the atmosphere. He would snuff it up, so to speak, from his window morning and night, at whatever risk of taking cold; and he was always observing the movements of the clouds and the shining of the stars. He loved to cite the authority of a certain Mathew de la Drôme, with whom he was in correspondence, and whom we children had come to believe to be a sorcerer or a mender of weather. He himself used to make forecasts — and if you wanted to flatter him, you would ask him to predict the weather. He was seldom mistaken, whether it was that luck was on his side or that he really had rightly interpreted the direction of the winds. This trivial reputation, which he enjoyed, seemed to make

him one with the mysterious laws of nature, whose oracles he uttered.

As soon as he had moved his books and instruments thither he found himself at home in the tower chamber and declared himself pleased with it. It had a view of the sky and at the same time of all four quarters of the horizon; and would capture the slightest ray of the sun, from whatsoever direction it might come. As for the direction of the wind, that would be easily ascertained.

A great clatter informed him that his furniture was following him upstairs. Aunt Deen was presiding over the removal in person, not without mutterings and grumblings. With the bedside steps under one arm, a bolster under the other, and a candlestick in each hand, she preceded, with stimulating remarks, a squad which followed in Indian file, but without much team work in their manœuvres. Tem Bossette came first with an easy chair on his head (he had consented to a reconciliation, sealed by a bottle of red wine). Then appeared a wardrobe oscillating on four legs, which on reaching the top of the stairs were revealed as half belonging to The Hanged and half (the smaller half) to Mimi Pachoux, whom also victory had recalled to the fold.

"Upon my word," said Aunt Deen to her brother during the defiling of her troops, "I'd like to know why you couldn't stay downstairs! Hoisting all your things up this narrow staircase!"

And as grandfather indifferently acknowledged her

remark merely by a vague gesture she resorted next to sarcasm:

"Of course, that doesn't distress Monsieur! Monsieur would never put himself out for a trifle like that! Comfortably seated in the easy chair that poor Tem has drenched with sweat, Monsieur will observe the progress of events! And meanwhile, I shall have to come up and down a hundred times a day. And the maids likewise. But you don't care what trouble you make us: you'll always find everything you need ready at your hand."

The attack was direct and severe. Before replying grandfather cast a startled glance upon the seat which Tem had transported, fearful of the reported deluge. When he perceived it to be dry and intact he recovered his serenity and replied with the utmost calmness:

"I ask nothing of any one."

"Because you never lack for anything; you live like a pig in clover."

They were both right. Grandfather never made any demands, but every one was eager to anticipate his slightest wish. Thus he uttered no complaint against the piercing winds that besieged his tower; but the day after his removal all the chinks around the doors and windows were carefully stopped up.

Aunt Deen's dissatisfaction had given voice to the general opinion. This unexpected exodus, utterly without necessity, cast a shadow over our father and mother, who vainly sought for its reason.

"Why must you be up so high?"

"Altitude has always agreed with me."

I admit that on this occasion I sided with grandfather. The tower chamber with its four views, its isolation, its special odour (it had never been opened except when some one went for apples, which used to ripen there all winter long) had long had an irresistible attraction for me. Since it was henceforth to be inhabited I promised myself to visit it frequently.

This episode was soon put into the shade by another, much more important and of a character to make a much deeper impression upon my imagination. Coming home from school one morning, I learned from my usual source of information, Aunt Deen, that this time it was settled. She imparted this news with an air of great mystery, but mystery itself with her was noisy in its manifestation. The word *settled* assumed upon her lips a formidable importance. What was settled?

"The deed is signed. Just now. I am very glad."

What deed? I didn't understand a word of it all.

"Well, we are to remain in our house. *They* can never trouble us again."

Didn't I already know that *they* had been utterly routed, dispersed, chastised, overcome, beaten, reduced to nothingness, like the Persians in my ancient history whom a handful of Greeks had chased

into the sea? How should she think to surprise me by telling me a secret already several days old, perhaps several weeks old, and about which every one had been talking freely? A child does not enter the region of preparations, delays, formalities and judicial scribblings. But a capital event shortly illustrated Aunt Deen's declaration.

Grandfather returned earlier than usual from his walk, and as one of us remarked upon his abnormal punctuality he took himself off without a word. When, after the second bell, we entered the dining-room with empty stomachs and ravenous appetites, what was our surprise to find him already there, sitting at table, but not in his official place, the place of honour in the centre opposite our mother, as is fitting for the head of the family, the reigning king. Without confiding his intention to any one, he had changed the napkin rings and had taken his place at the end of the table, opposite the window. It is true that he had chosen a very good place whence he could see the trees in the garden and even a bit of sky between their branches. To a lover of sunshine the view was not unimportant. But all the same it was a revolution in the family life and the entire domestic economy. Or rather, I was not mistaken, it was an abdication.

I was well up in abdications. Had I not been obliged to study in my history book those of the sluggard kings, whose hair they cut off before immuring them in a cloister? — and in spite of myself

I gazed at grandfather's slightly curling white hair. Above all I had heard my brother Bernard reciting the story of Charles V, by which I had been strongly impressed. That master of the world, laying aside his grandeur, had retired to a monastery of Estramadura, where he mended clocks, and to give himself a foretaste of death had had his funeral celebrated while he was still alive. Historians that dote upon truth have since then assured me that these details are fabulous. I am sorry, for I have not forgotten them, whereas an innumerable number of demonstrated facts have dropped out of my memory. But at that time I believed with iron conviction in the retirement of Charles V, the false obsequies and the clocks. Grandfather also knew how to mend clocks, and I at once established relations between the two sovereigns.

Aunt Deen, punctual for once, and our mother, who was not far behind us, shared our astonishment. Then all eyes were fixed upon our father, who was just then entering the room. At a glance he took in the situation, and with him decision was never slow to follow. He came forward with rapid steps.

"No, no," he said, "I will not have this. Nothing should be changed here. Father, take your own place, I beg."

Assuredly not one of us would have resisted an entreaty which was also a command. But our father's energetic regulating force had before our very faces come in contact with another force the

power of which I had never dreamed of, that of immovability. Grandfather did not stir. He had resolved not to stir.

Father, receiving no reply, repeated his request more gently,—I can not say more humbly, for at all times, in spite of himself, he wore an air of pride. He received in the face an outburst of that eternal little laugh, with the added accompaniment of the words:

"Oho! what a fuss about nothing."

"Father, give me this proof of your affection!"

"One place or another, what's the odds? I am very comfortable here, and here I stay," he said, adding in a tone of superb disdain, "if you only knew, my poor Michel, how little I care!"

He cared for nothing: Tem Bossette had told me so; everything was all one to him; one seat or another, one house or another. Such words as these, uttered before us children, were enough to exasperate our father, but he controlled himself.

"There must be a headship in the family," he urged.

"Bah! We live under a republic, and I believe in liberty."

Father saw that it was perfectly useless to insist, and he merely added:

"Then you do really refuse to come back to your own place?"

"I shall not move."

Philomena, the waitress, offered the platter,

Father signed to her to offer it to grandfather, after which there was nothing for him but to take the seat of honour. It was a relief to us all; we all felt that the place belonged to him by right and that he alone deserved to occupy it. He and no one else had long been the head of the family. At the slightest difficulty or vexation every one turned to him, every one appealed to him. Now the disquietude which had weighed upon the house for so long a time would be ended. Now we should be directed. No more sluggard kings! The reins of government, as my history book expressed it, would be held in strong hands. And it was right that the head of the house should have all the insignia of authority. A king does not occupy the second place, and evidently my father would not have crowned himself of his own accord.

Thus the transferrence of power had taken place in our presence.

I should not have anticipated the change of feeling which took place within me, almost suddenly. Grandfather's government had always seemed to me precarious and derisory. But as soon as he refused to exercise it I began to admire his disinterestedness and to discover the poetry of abdication. His sovereign disdain of material things appeared to me full of grandeur, and I even went so far as to interpret to myself the expression which had once seemed sacrilegious to me —" whether one lives in one house or another." If he had done nothing to protect our house, perhaps it was because he cared for higher

and more distant things. From his tower chamber he was entering into communication with the winds and the stars, predicting the future. The weather and the universe were absorbing him; he could no longer devote himself to common tasks. There was another mode of interpreting life, which I vaguely felt without understanding it, and which attracted me by its unusualness, and its enigma. The deposed king, clothed in the mystery which was conferred upon him by an unimaginable learning, was recovering his prestige and even assuming, all unaware to himself, a degree of ascendancy over my spirit.

I gazed by turns at father and grandfather: father in his normal place, thinking of each of us, diffusing peace and order about him; the light of his marvellous aptitude at command shining from his clear cut features and especially from his piercing eyes; grandfather, the delicate lines of his face, almost feminine notwithstanding his long white beard, his eyes always slightly clouded, often abstracted, indifferent to all around him, and more interested in the trees of the garden or the bit of sky that he saw through the window than in us. For the first time I was astonished to find such a difference between the two men. I had never observed it before, or had not thought about it. Now it struck me so strongly that I almost uttered my surprise aloud. It doubtless would have escaped me had I not felt the unseemliness

of the fact. A son ought to resemble his father — there could be no doubt upon the subject. Or else it wasn't worth while to be the son of some one. And whom was I like?

BOOK II

I

THE PICTURES

All these events, still so fresh in my imagination, grew dim and were temporarily lost in the current of the days which, during the long vacation upon which we were entering, began to flow by like a beautiful stream, full to the brim.

As a general thing our father took his vacation at the same time with us, and made the most of it for getting nearer to us. We saw him much less often this year, and became somewhat weaned from those stories of heroism with which he used to enliven our walks, kindling and stirring us up with fierce desire to fight battles and win victories. When we heard him tell them we used to toss our heads, our eyes would sparkle, we would walk faster, and our steps fell into cadence. But to meet the new expenses which he had assumed he had given up his annual rest. Once in a while he would snatch an afternoon, and make a hasty attempt to re-establish the old nearness to us. But his patients came to seek him at all hours of the day, or lay in wait for him as he passed along. Everything conspired to deprive us of him.

Yet it was evident that his authority was every-

where in exercise. When cracks had appeared in the front of the house iron supports were placed underneath before it was repainted. The rooms were repapered — mine with pleasant pictures of cats and dogs — and the floors were mended where the boards had shrunken apart. Even the kitchen, where for years Mariette had been obstinately insisting on repairs, without producing any effect upon grandfather, who would invariably answer her with the old proverb, "One wastes one's suds in washing a negro's head"— even the kitchen was thoroughly repaired and paved with wonderful red bricks. The entrance gate which would not close had been repaired, and even provided with a key, a key which really turned in the lock! The linden was trimmed, permitting the sundial once more to mark the hours. The break in the wall, by which the mole-crickets used to penetrate, by which, one memorable evening, I had seen our enemies introducing themselves into the place, was closed by a balustrade, set into the trunk of the chestnut tree. And now too was seen what had never before been seen: the three labourers at their post, and — still more marvellous sight — all three working at once!

Little by little the garden — my old garden that used to be a perfect forest of weeds, in which there was never an end to discovering new trees or plants — so well were they hidden — was transformed and reduced to order. The alleys were cleaned out and sanded, the beds remade and the

rose bushes trimmed. The trees, reduced to their proper proportions, cast a well defined shade. A useless field became an orchard. A fountain, set in the heart of a grass plot, sent up a shaft of water to fall in a fine musical rain into its basin. There were flowers and fruits to gather for banquets and desserts. But we no longer dared to feel of the pears and peaches — still less to give to their stems that slight see-saw motion which made them fall. In the wide newly-opened space our larceny would have been discovered. And I vainly sought to lay low with my sword the underbrush that used to grow thick on the edge of the chestnut grove. Tem Bossette refused to whittle me out the smallest wooden sword, and watched over the stakes as if he had paid for them himself.

These changes were not made all at once, and no doubt I have their chronology mixed. We hardly noticed them during their slow and gradual progress, and when they were all made we ceased to remember how things were before. Indeed they were not accomplished without many perturbations. Tem wiped his brow unceasingly and sweated out all his wine. Mimi Pachoux stole away no longer but made a great noise to attest the certainty of his presence; and The Hanged bent his dantesque countenance over obscure and useful tasks. The community of their fate had by no means brought about their reconciliation. They were always observing, spying upon one another, but all

three observed and watched the house still more closely. What did they fear to see emerging from it?

I discovered one day. My father, who had become their master, drew near with rapid step. He spoke to each with kindly encouragement, but he examined their work as one who knew.

"All the same, he knows what he is about," Mimi admiringly confessed.

I learned from Tem that after having severely admonished them he had raised their wages. But he insisted upon good work. In a word, he drew them back to himself whenever they demurred at a task, or soured upon it. But without doubt he upset all the old habits of a region where people love to drift along, taking life as easily as they drink its new wine. This is why Tem Bossette, more than any of them, sighed for the ancient reign of the Sluggard Kings, when he had lived tranquil and forgotten among his vines.

Once he tried in my presence to move grandfather to pity for his sad fate.

"Friend," was the answer, "I am nobody here; go to some one else."

Never had grandfather seemed so full of spirits as since his abdication. No, certainly he did not regret his lost authority, but he made a point of knowing nothing of the acts of the new régime. Did he travel over the kingdom? He seemed never to perceive that its very pebbles were blossoming. But

one day, when he was taking the air in the garden, I saw him combing his beard and rubbing his eyebrows — a sure token that he was dissatisfied; he spat, as a sign of contempt, and the little impertinent laugh accompanied words which were incomprehensible to me.

"Oho! everything is being put to rights — what they need is a geometrician rather than a gardener."

What was he finding fault with? The garden beds, the trees, obedient to the hand of man, made a richly disposed picture. My little ideas of life had here grouped themselves and taken form with unwonted pleasure. I was provoked with grandfather's lack of enthusiasm.

"See," I said to him, not knowing just what to say, "those beautiful red cannas around the basin of the fountain."

He took me by the arm with unexpected roughness.

"Look out, child, you'll spoil the grass!"

I had indeed set my foot upon the grass border of the path. And I clearly perceived that grandfather was ridiculing my admiration and the garden both at once. Suddenly, under the influence of his sarcasm, I recalled the old garden, the old garden as it had been, a wild mass of foliage, when I might trample on the very borders, with their sparse flowers growing helter-skelter, where I had known the wild joy of liberty.

Grandfather would never have permitted himself

such a criticism before my father. My mind having been drawn to observe the dissimilarity between them, I had noticed the constraint in their relations. Father was always making advances; treating grandfather with extreme deference; never failing to inquire as to his health, his walks, and even, indulgent to his meteorological hobby, asking him as to weather prospects. Grandfather would reply briefly, without making the slightest attempt to continue the conversation, which soon fell flat,— or he would bring forward his little wounding smile, as soon as a subject was introduced on which it was not certain that they were in agreement.

One day father asked for his account books, explaining that he needed to verify certain memoranda of claims upon the property which had not yet been settled and which appeared to be exorbitant. Grandfather opened his eyes:

"My account books?"

"Yes."

"I never kept any."

Father hesitated for a second. "Very well," he said simply and turned away.

In his tower where he had settled himself, grandfather took great comfort in wearing his famous green dressing gown and Greek cap of black velvet with its silk tassel. With his telescope fixed upon a pedestal, he would watch by day the boats that ploughed the waters of the lake, and at night he would bring the stars nearer — but only those which

moved in the southern half of the sky, because from his former room he had only had a view of this part of the heavens, and knew it better. Much more frequently than in the old days he would come down stairs in this astrologer's costume, like a deposed monarch who no longer sets store by majesty. It was with great difficulty that Aunt Deen prevented him from going into town, or walking in the country, in this accoutrement.

"It does no one any harm," he would observe.

Nevertheless, after many entreaties, he would consent to replace the cap with a broad brimmed felt hat, and the dressing gown with a frock coat which had to be almost daily rubbed with benzine, in spite of him, to keep it decent. He would bring home from his walks aromatic plants of which he used to make decoctions which he would mix with brandy, and mushrooms which awakened Aunt Deen's misgivings. I used to look at them, smell them, but for nothing in the world would I have tasted them. I could not think, in those days, that anything good to eat could be found outside a provision store, except, on a pinch, in our garden.

My father's reign had lasted three good years, perhaps, indeed, nearer four than three, when an event occurred of large importance in my child life — I fell ill. The previous year I had made my first communion, with such deep fervour that my mother had confidentially wondered to Aunt Deen:

"Is he going to follow the example of Mélanie and Stephen? Will God require of us a third child? His will be done!"

My adventure was almost that of *the fair child who escaped from the arms of his mother.* In the course of a walk of our "division" I had tumbled into a brook which we had been forbidden to approach, and rather than be blamed had decided to say nothing about it, though I was soaked up to the chest. Fever set in the next day or the day after. I learned later that it was a severe attack of pneumonia, which in time degenerated into pleurisy. My life was believed to be in danger, and my malady became the occasion of a change in the family arrangements which had almost altered the whole direction of my youth. In a half-slumber I heard whisperings around me, the meaning of which I at once interpreted.

"Am I going to die?" I asked mother and Aunt Deen who were at my bedside.

"Be quiet, naughty boy!" murmured Aunt Deen blowing her nose with a sob and deep sighs, which she doubtless supposed herself to be suppressing.

Mother laid her hand upon my brow — its touch refreshed me as her gentle and persuasive voice said,

"Don't be uneasy; we are here."

I knew very well what death was. The school porter having died, a weird whim of our religious director had constrained us to defile, class by class, before the bier upon which the corpse had been laid,

before the cover of the coffin was screwed down. Now this porter was a short stout man, whose mortal remains required a cubic receptacle in which he looked to us so comical and smirking that we burst into a laugh that, though it scandalised us, we found it impossible to repress. The indignant professor who was acting as marshal to this abortive pilgrimage overwhelmed us with the severest reproaches, not hesitating to add thereto in due time a sermon upon our final destiny. With no circumlocution he informed us that we were all to die, and perhaps very soon, that our parents would die, and that we should lose every one we loved. By degrees our laughter died away. A vague fear took possession of us, heightened by the monotonous repetition of the word death, continually thrown at our heads. When I went back to the house that morning, greatly moved in spite of myself by that vehement discourse, I looked at my father and mother as I had never looked at them before. They were coming and going as usual, without dreaming that I was watching them. They even laughed at one of Bernard's remarks: I heard them laugh — a hearty laugh very like that which the unlucky porter in his box had aroused in us. Ah, that laugh! especially our father's laugh, strong and sonorous, giving a splendid impression of health — how it comforted me, and how it put to flight the terrified curiosity which had taken possession of me.

"Aha!" I thought in my little brain, "the

teacher was lying like a dentist! They will not die — that is certain. They can't die. To begin with, when people laugh, that means that they don't die."

This evident conclusion set my heart at rest. So far as I was concerned there was no longer any question on the subject. They were in front and I behind them. And since there was no risk for them how could death touch me, passing them by?

My question "Am I going to die?" was therefore simply designed to make myself interesting. In their presence I was safe.

Mother and Aunt Deen watched me by turns, that I might see no strange face; mother took two nights out of three, and I liked her best. She glided into the room like a mist over the lake, without the slightest sound. I was never aware of any of her movements. Her cares and her caresses mingled; while Aunt Deen, the dear woman, at the cost of tremendous effort, disturbed and irritated me.

The important part which I myself was playing was by no means irksome to me. I seemed to myself to have become smaller than my brother James and my sister Nicola, and that I might just as well be rocked to sleep with lullabies. I used to ask for Venice and The Pool, because of my own drenching, and they thought I was delirious. I distinctly see in memory those two faces bending over me, and still more clearly that of my father, who was continually coming to see me; the attentive, fixed, al-

most severe expression with which he noted the effects of my disease upon my body was quite strange to me. It was his professional expression; the examination once over, his features would relax, lightened up by fatherhood.

One day father brought in another doctor, but I clearly saw that the little man stood in awe of him, and invariably repeated what he said to him. With implacable logic I observed to my faithful nurses,

"What's the use of troubling that gentleman? Father knows much more about it than he. Father doesn't need any one."

I probably uttered these words or something like them in a low voice. Aunt Deen promptly approved.

"The child is right. He speaks so sensibly that he is surely getting well."

She repeated my remark to father, who was still anxious, and who smiled, as he had not done of late.

"Yes," he said; "we shall save him."

I had no need of any such assurance. I felt it so strongly that that was enough. He never dreamed that this very illness, over which he was triumphing by skill and will-power, was later to be the origin of the home tragedy in which I wandered away from him.

My brothers and sisters were brought into my room, two by two, in succession, guarded with all sorts of advice — not to stay long, to make no noise, not to touch the medicine bottles. Naturally they were soon bored and departed. Each of them took

some credit for my cure, which I owed to the prayers of Stephen and Mélanie, to Bernard's martial exhortations and to the comfortable gaiety of Louise. As for the two little ones, they were prudently kept in the background after James, no doubt repeating what he had heard among the servants, had shouted, jumping up and down with enthusiasm,

"Fançois" (he could hardly say *r*) "will soon be dead."

Grandfather never appeared at my bedside. Perhaps he apprehended no danger. I think it was rather that he had an invincible horror of illness and all that might result from it. Deeply concerned with his own health, he kept careful account of his bodily functions, and with that perfect courtesy from which he never departed he never failed to inform the entire household of the state of his internal economy; when that went ill he would lament grievously and Aunt Deen would produce from a cupboard a venerable instrument which when rubbed up and mended was still good for use.

"Nothing is more important," he would say, in our presence, gazing upon the instrument with a satisfied air.

My convalescence was a period of enchantment, not for the new zest that it lent to life, the savour of which only he can taste who has deemed his life put in jeopardy, but because it truly opened to me the mysterious realm of books. I was not unfamiliar with the *Rose Library*. I knew Canon Schmid, and

Jules Verne's romances, and even the fairy tales of Perrault and Andersen, but I had never found in any of them that heart thrill which keeps you awake in bed at night, expecting, fearing some unknown delight not unmingled with danger, such as I had found in Aunt Deen's amazing stories, and above all in the epic tales that father used to tell.

Not to weary me, they began by bringing me illustrated books. Bernard let me look over the Epinal albums which he was collecting for the sake of the military costumes, and which it cost him some self-denial to lend. I begged for Gustave Doré's Bible, of which once in the parlour by special favour I had been shown the pictures without being permitted to touch it. The two heavy volumes were propped up on the table, in great state, and I passed long hours in turning the pages. Mother would come and go in the room, somewhat surprised at my being so good, and even a little disturbed by my silence. She would approach noiselessly and look over my shoulder.

"You are not getting tired?"

"Oh, no!"

"You are not bored?"

"Oh, mamma!"

"Are they beautiful?"

"I don't know."

When one is a child one doesn't know what is beautiful. The beautiful thing is to have the heart satisfied. What a sudden uplift my entire æsthetic

nature received from them! The unframed outlines of nature had never impressed me; now that, copied, transferred to a square of paper, I could look at them, I saw them, not only on the motionless page, but everywhere, and all alive. The house with its great stones, the walled-in garden — I had often used to touch them, understand them, possess them; — and besides, they belonged to me. But beyond our house the universe began, and its limitlessness had repelled me, so that I could never think of it as having definite outlines. And here those outlines were, before my eyes; through the open Bible I discovered them.

At thirty years' distance I find again in my memory, with no need of verification, the pictures of Gustave Doré. The pages turn of their own accord and my beloved phantoms reappear. Here are those visions of dread, Leviathan upheaving the sea, the destroying Angel exterminating Sennacherib's army, the long train of Nicannor's elephants between which Judas Maccabeus has to pass, and Death in the Apocalypse on his pale horse. They were not my favourites, and in the evening I used even to avoid them. My favourites were those quiet, reposeful, almost shadowy Oriental landscapes, where the summer sunlight seemed to draw up mists, where strange plants grew most unlike our oaks and chestnuts, where in the background were shadows of oxen and camels, far away like boats upon the lake in time of fog.

The birth of Eve seemed lovely to me. While Adam sleeps among the flowers of Eden, she uprises erect and unclothed, with floating hair. One of her knees — look at it, I am sure of it! — slightly bent, is caressed by the sunlight. Through her, by this light upon her knee, I felt something of the pure perfection of nudity long before I even dreamed of its desire. Abraham leads his flocks to the land of Canaan, and the backs of the huddled sheep undulate like the waves that I had seen from the lake shore. The cradle of Moses floats upon the Nile; Pharaoh's daughter has come out from the palace that stands basking in the sun; she draws near the river; one of her waiting women takes up the little bark. Rebecca, in a long white veil, rests her pitcher upon the margin of the well and talks with Eliezer, a venerable old man; but I don't distinguish her from the Samaritan woman who takes the same position. Ruth, kneeling, gleans the wheat ears. The great cedars of Lebanon, cut down, lie upon the earth which their shadow overspreads; they are waiting to be used in building the temple in Jerusalem. The angel of the Annunciation hovers in the air, like a falling leaf upheld by the wind. Jesus in the house of Lazarus is sitting on the window ledge, the moonlight stealing through the palm trees. Mary crouching at his feet is drinking in his words, Martha, standing, is busy with household cares. Pictures through which peace flows like a limpid stream, and which are but the transposition of every-day

scenes, almost like those which I might have seen at our house and in the country,— pictures of obscure lives, through which God passes.

One day when I declined to be present at the return of the prodigal son to the paternal home, my mother, who loved that parable, asked the reason of this disdain.

"Why don't you look at this page?"

I made a gesture of disgust. It seemed commonplace to me — a father forgiving his son — what was there surprising in that?

Athalia wringing her hands in despair beside the temple wall, while the soldiers come running to kill her, recalled to my mother her convent. She had herself taken part in the chorus of that tragedy which Racine had written for the young pupils of Saint-Cyr, and which by a happy tradition all girls' boarding schools used to present in those days; the lines came back to her with a rush:

> The universe is full of His magnificence:
> Let us praise God and worship Him forever.

She would recite them with that emotion which religious things always awakened in her, and her tones touched me more directly than that sophisticated art which was beyond my powers.

Another little book had a part in opening my mind to poetry,— it was a book of ballads. A knight wandering in the forest, snatched away from Titania, queen of the elves and sylphs, her cup of

happiness and carried it off to his castle on his galloping horse. A little girl on the bank of a stream sang the romance of the swan's nest hidden among the reeds, and dreamed of a knight who should come upon a red roan steed. The Lord of Burleigh married a shepherdess, who languished in the palace to which he took her, and died of longing for her village and her cottage. How I entered into their longings and their melancholy! Their heartaches poured into my heart a delicious pain, which I could not fathom. Yet I was beginning to discern that we have within ourselves an upspringing fountain of infinitely delicate joys.

Did my father distrust these exciting readings as he did grandfather's music? He brought me short, simple biographies of great men. It is never too early to make acquaintance with such. One forms a habit of comparing himself with the heroes, and doesn't fail to say to oneself: "I have time before me; when I am their age I mean to have surpassed them. . . ." By degrees one begins to look for those whose exploits come late in life. I do not know which of these exemplary personages it was of whom I read that he entered the school of adversity. I imagined that school to be at least as severe as the Polytechnic, or Saint-Cyr, to which my brother Bernard was destined, and I burned to present myself there for admission. I did not know that it is the only one that requires no examination, no preliminaries, above all, no recommendation. I confided

my desire to my mother. She smiled, which vexed me, and assured me that I should indeed present myself there for admission, but she hoped it would be as late as possible.

These readings transported me into a glorious state of enthusiasm. I could not have understood sarcasm. No one made use of it in our family. There was only grandfather's little laugh. Our parents loved gaiety, took pleasure even in the noise that we made, but they never used ridicule. They took life seriously, as an opportunity for well-doing, and deemed that it deserved the greatest respect. Grandfather, running through my books, on the first visit that he deigned to pay me after being assured that I was recovering, let fall certain exclamations:

"Oho! the Bible! and the Famous Men! Poor child! Just wait, I'll bring you some books."

And in fact he brought me "Scenes from the Public and Private Life of Animals," and the "Adventures of Three Old Sailors," both adorned with illustrations. The latter volume was in a sad condition, the stitches loose, the leaves falling out, and the end entirely gone as well as the cover. It must have been translated from the English and its humour perplexed me. Those three sailors, who had escaped from shipwreck, landed on a desert island where they were pursued by a tiger. They climbed a tree, by way of refuge from the ferocious creature, and the picture showed them clinging to the trunk perched one above the other, with hair standing on

end, eyes staring, toes curled up. The wild beast was springing up toward them, it was easy to see that with a little exertion he would have them. Then with fierce resolution inspired by the most imperative necessity, the two uppermost bore down with all their weight upon the lowermost one, in order to force him to let go, hoping that this prize would suffice to satisfy the assailant's fury. And while bearing down with all their might they addressed to their unhappy companion the most touching words of parting:

"Good-bye, Jeremiah" (such was his unpropitious name), "we will go and console your poor father and your betrothed."

But Jeremiah, like Rachel, refused to be comforted, and stiffened himself, to cling the tighter. Accustomed as I was to tales of heroism I was much displeased with these traitorous friends.

"Scenes in the Life of Animals" appeared to me to have more sense. It was a motley collection such as all old-time libraries prided themselves on containing. Grandville's vignettes revealed to me traces of animal characteristics in men, whom till then I had thought of only as in the image of God. The animals in the book were dressed like men and women and looked like them. I soon became accustomed to this treatment, the disguises were so natural! Here were the nightingale as a postman, the dog as a lackey, the rabbit as a petty subaltern employé, and there were the vulture as a landed proprietor, the lion as an old beau, the turkey as a banker, the ass as

an academician. The centipedes were playing the piano for a young lady dancing on the tight rope, while the cricket was making a trumpet of the carolla of the bindweed. The chameleon, as a deputy, mounted the tribune to state that he was proud and happy to be always of everybody's opinion. The shark and the saw-fish had on surgeons' blouses, and frankly declared, "We are going to cut muscles, saw bones — in a word, heal the sick." The wolf, having murdered a sheep, is reading in his prison the *Idylls* of Mme Deshoulières, while celebrity comes to him under the form of a complaint sold by hawkers, to be sung to the air of *Fualdès:*

Hearken, Woodpeckers and Ducks,
Jays and Turkeys, Crows and Rooks;
The story of a frightful crime
Worthy of Harpies, in their time.
Who performed the direful act?
A wolf, indelicate, in fact.

The bear was enjoying retirement in the bosom of his family; he could be seen warming his youngest born by holding him before the fire by the paws; his wife was hanging linen before the fire and a young cub in a corner was lifting up his little shirt by way of precaution before retiring; some one is knocking at the door, but the legend explains:

"We live by ourselves; we detest visitors and bores."

A parroquet flapping his wings without being able to fly represented the illustrious poet Kacatogan.

And the martlet with the magpie and the crow made a trio of women of letters. I did not know what a woman of letters could be, but the White Blackbird, who like the parroquet was a poet, taught me in his memoirs:

While I was composing my poems she was bedaubing reams of paper with her scribblings. I would recite my verses to her aloud, and she, indifferent, kept on writing while I was doing so. She produced romances with a facility almost equal to mine, always choosing the most dramatic subjects: parricides, kidnappings, murders, and even pocket-picking, always taking pains to attack the government, in passing, and to preach the emancipation of Martlets. In one word, no effort was too great for her mind, no clap-trap for her modesty; it never occurred to her to erase a line, nor to work out a plan before setting to work. She was the typical lettered Martlet.

Aunt Deen also produced stories with marvellous facility; she, too, preferred terrible subjects and was not averse to attacking the government. I even suspected her of not knowing, when she began, how she was going to end up, and of inventing the plots of her stories as she went along. Then why didn't she bedaub paper? The simplest way was to ask her.

"Aunt Deen, are you a woman of letters?"

She asked me twice to repeat my question, as if women of letters really belonged to the zoological

kingdom, in the category of monsters. After which she shrugged her shoulders, not even deigning to reply directly.

"The child is certainly crazy. Augustus's books have addled his brain."

There was some talk of taking away the "Scenes in the Life of Animals," the caricatures in which had amused even my father and brought a smile to his lips. The effect of the incident was to attach me all the more strongly to the White Blackbird, who had nearly caused the book to be placed upon the Index. And I soon came to see what it undoubtedly was that distinguished Aunt Deen from the Lettered Martlet. The latter, with immaculate plumage, was in fact merely painted — covered over with a layer of flour which gave her that appearance of having fallen from the sky. The White Blackbird, who never suspected it, and thought he had discovered in the Martlet a creature unique in all the world, becoming suspicious of a mysterious pot of some white mixture, had a disastrous experience. His poems moving him to tenderness, he shed such profuse tears over his companion as to dissolve the plaster of paris with which she was covered, and reveal her as the most commonplace of blackbirds. Now I had often wept in Aunt Deen's arms; she had bewailed my sorrows without losing anything of her colour. She made use neither of paste nor flour; no, decidedly, however beautiful the stories she made up, she would never be a woman of letters.

Another bit of knowledge came to me from the White Blackbird. I learned from him to enjoy the charm of words for their own sake, independently of their meaning. After his conjugal mishap, he fled to the forest to confide his woes to the Nightingale, uttering to her this plaint: *I was co-ordinating fooleries while you were in the woods.* I did not clearly grasp the meaning, because of the co-ordination of fooleries, which eluded me, and yet I loved the melody of this phrase, and repeated it over and over to myself. The reply of the Nightingale, still more deeply charged with mystery, completely upset me. *I love the Rose,* he sighed. *Sadi the Persian has sung of her: I wear out my throat all night singing to her, but she sleeps, and hears me not. Her chalice is at this moment closed; she is cherishing an old Beetle there; and to-morrow morning, when I go back to my couch, exhausted with suffering and weariness, then she will open her petals that a bee may devour her heart.* I took no interest either in the old Beetle or in Sadi the Persian; the exhausted Nightingale, and that Rose with the devoured heart, communicated to me, by the magic of syllables, a sort of far-off presentiment of love-pain, in which I found a vague and ineffable sadness.

Such sadness was very quick to pass. Much sooner, however, I had borrowed from my new friends, the animals, an art of ridiculing which I found most delightful. I could see no one without finding his double among the beasts. Tem Bossette

with his flat face and goggle eyes became a frog — the very frog that tried to make himself as big as the ox; Mimi Pachoux with his furtive step and sudden disappearance I compared to a rat, and The Hanged, who always seemed to find difficulty in using his arms, to a kangaroo, with his very short front legs.

This turn of mind shocked and disturbed my mother. One day she received in my presence a visit from a person of a certain age who was superintending a work room, founding an orphan asylum, building a school, in a word, directing more works in the parish than actually existed. Her name was Mlle Tapinois. She was tall and dried up, with a pointed nose, sloping shoulders and a frigid air. She cooed softly without a moment's interruption. When she was gone I showed mother, in my book, an old dove in a night gown, with a candle-stick in its claw:

"Mademoiselle Tapinois," I said triumphantly.

Mother protested against my unseemly comparison.

"She is a holy woman," she concluded, by way of arousing my sympathy.

But though she did not admit it, I saw that she had recognised the likeness.

Encouraged by the degree of success I had achieved with Mlle Tapinois, I thenceforth watched our visitors to deal out to them the same treatment, and the facility of this game amazed me. I had no difficulty in finding a stout landed proprietor for

the elephant, a woe-begone collector of mortgages for the owl, a pianist for the centipede. An old nobleman with a Roman nose reminded me of the falcon whom the *Revolutions had ruined.* In a very short while my collection was further enriched by the bear, the chameleon, and several rabbits, drawn from the registry or the tax office. But the region at that time had no departmental muse worthy to be catalogued among the martlets. They tell me that there are swarms of them now-a-days.

Grandfather, to whom I confided my observations, gave them his full approbation.

"Now you know," he said, "that animals and men are brothers. But the animals are better fellows than we."

Nevertheless a secret instinct warned me not to consult my parents on this subject.

II

THE DESIRE

FINE weather had come. Three months still lay between us and the long vacation. Father, agreeing with the timid little colleague whom he had again called in to support his own opinion, declared that I was not to return to school until the end of the vacation next October.

"The child needs out-of-door air. The first thing is to build up his health."

I was pained by this decision, which wounded my pride. If I were not in school during the last quarter, I could not hope for a wreath at the distribution of prizes. For I was full of emulation, and loved to take the first place, though this brought down upon me grandfather's ridicule.

"Those classifications mean nothing. First or last it's all one."

Father laid out for me a very simple plan of life. A country walk morning and evening, far from the microbes of the town, where you can breath fresh air uncontaminated by human beings. Thus I should recover strength and appetite. But who would walk with me and be my guide? Who would undertake a peripatetic preceptorship of this

sort? Father, already behind in his duties because of my long illness, belonged to his absorbing profession; mother, whose presence was certainly required by the whole family, especially the little ones, could hardly ever leave the house except to go to church. Aunt Deen had no out-of-door legs, a deficiency which did not prevent her going up and down stairs, from kitchen to tower, a hundred times a day. There remained grandfather. He always took a walk morning and evening on his own account; what would it cost him to take me along? This would suit all round; the plan was evidently the best possible.

I perceived, however, that it met a serious resistance, for I overheard my parents discussing it in the calm and confident tone which they always used when regulating, in perfect accord, all questions concerning us.

"I would not have him turn him against the house," said my father.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as if it were wrong to admit such a thought, "he wouldn't do that! You don't think that of your own father, surely! Of course he has his whims, and his ideas are not always ours. What he needs is God. But he is good hearted; he will be grateful to you for your confidence. And we could not ask such a thing of a stranger."

"I am not quite satisfied with the plan," said father.

A little later he resumed the subject. "I will speak to him; there seems to be no other way."

When this proposition concerning me was broached to him, grandfather acceded to it without either enthusiasm or hostility, with an indifference that wounded me.

"I'd just as soon. It's the same to me whether I take my walk alone or with some one." (Naturally!) "Children ought to live out of doors. Study does no good. No more do medicines."

Father no doubt had an interview with him at which I was not present, and the affair was decided. How would he act toward his new companion? He always treated my brothers and sisters and me, even the two youngest, like reasonable persons, though a little more interesting than others, lending to our remarks as much attention as to those of grown persons; but we had an impression that he couldn't always tell us apart, and that he would cheerfully have dispensed with us all, which seemed to us an affront.

Why had father told mother that he was not quite satisfied? On the morning of my first walk with grandfather he was waiting for us at the door on our return. He inspected me, looking me over from head to foot, then, as if resolved, he took my hand and placed it in grandfather's with a certain solemnity — as a reigning king might do, I thought.

"Here is my son," he said; "I entrust him to you; he holds the future of our house."

Grandfather received the precious trust indifferently, replying in a slightly sarcastic tone, thus at

once putting the incident upon an every-day footing:

"Don't worry, Michel; no one is going to rob you of him."

I smiled, standing between the two. How could grandfather rob my father of me?

The smallest details of that walk are present with me now. And rightly, so great was its importance in my life. But everything is important when one is little. After a rain the drenched fields seem to draw nearer to one another, and the plants reflect the sunlight from all their pendant drops. My eyes, purged by illness, must have thus shone.

"Where are we going, grandfather?"

I inclined to the direction of the town, where we should find attractions of all sorts, shops, bazars, show-windows, faces, noise and movement.

At the outset we were stopped by the closed gate, the key of which we had forgotten to bring.

"Run and get it, child. But why the devil should they barricade the gate?"

It was one of Aunt Deen's thousand precautions; the previous evening, or the one before, she had seen from afar a gipsy waggon, and since then she had been keeping prudent guard over the household. I ran, somewhat scandalised by grandfather's remark. Wasn't it necessary to guard the house against enemies? A kingdom has frontiers which must be respected; was it not enough that shadows crossed them every evening in spite of gates and bolts?

We are off at last, and grandfather at once turns his back upon the town:

"Child, I don't like towns."

Good-bye to shops and people! We had not walked ten minutes when he took it into his head to leave the highroad, along which we were walking at our ease, quite properly, without hurry, and took a footpath which crossed the fields haphazard.

"You're taking the wrong road, grandfather."

"Not at all. Child, I detest roads!"

Well, well! he was more surprising than when he used to come down to the dining-room in his dressing gown and Greek cap. I had always supposed that roads were made to be used, not despised. And besides, how could one get along without them when one went out?

The hardly perceptible path which we had taken obliged us to walk single file. I went first, in the capacity of scout. The wheat on one side was already tall, on the other side were oats, quivering on their slender stems. I had learned to know the various grains from our farmer. Wheat and oats soon mingled fraternally before me.

"Grandfather, there is no more path."

We might have expected it. Our path had vanished. Grandfather quietly passed before me, appeared to take his bearings, snuffed the wind, trampled down a few stalks, and reached a hedge which he overleaped with an ease that was surprising at his age.

"My boy," he said, helping me to scramble through it, "I abhor fences."

Our comradeship was beginning well! No roads, no fences! We soon entered a chestnut wood, not in the least like the four or five trees which were the pride of our domain. Here, above us, was a great vault supported by trunks and intermingled branches like so many colossal columns. I saw grandfather stoop and gather from the moss a mushroom that looked like a little white umbrella, wide open.

"This is a sort of amanita," he said. "It is supposed to be poisonous, whereas it is edible." (He tasted it to prove his words.) "It isn't the season, yet. I will teach you to know all the cryptogams. There are very few noxious ones. Nature is good, and never wishes us harm. It is men who spoil her. I know a priest who lives on Satan bolets, and is never the worse."

He laughed to himself at the priest who could swallow the devil without indigestion.

At last we reached an open space whence no house was to be seen, nor even a cultivated field,— not a trace of humanity. The woods separated us from the town and the lake, upon which a few craft were always sailing. At our back was a rocky hill, half covered with furze and brambles. A slender cascade fell from the summit and was transformed at our feet into a clear, noiseless rill. We were tramping through bracken and a coarse grass, starred with all the flowers of spring. The brook had given a

rare exuberance to all this vegetation. The monotonous sound of the waterfall by no means disturbed the solitude of the spot, at once wild and gentle and so secluded. One might have thought oneself at the very end of the earth — or at its beginning. I felt at once happy and desolate.

I had of course taken many a walk with my father. But he always took us to heights that commanded a view; he would point out by name the mountains on the edge of the horizon, the villages in the plain below, the ports on both sides of the lake. He made us feel that the earth was inhabited, and that it was interesting and beautiful because it was inhabited. Now I suddenly discovered the charm of wild nature.

"What is its name?" I asked grandfather to reassure myself.

"The name of what?" he asked, not comprehending.

"The place where we are."

The question surprised him, and provoked a little laugh that I did not enjoy.

"It has no name."

"Who owns it?"

"Nobody."

Nobody! That was very strange. Just as the house must always have belonged to us, I had supposed that the whole earth was divided into properties.

"To us, if you like," grandfather went on.

And his laugh, his terrible little laugh, began to undermine my notions about life, my beliefs. It produced upon me the effect of the touch of the finger that I used to give when I erected great buildings with my blocks. The edifice grew higher, higher,— I barely touched with my finger one of the columns at the base, and down it all came.

"Oh, to us!" I protested.

People were not to take possession of other people's property like that, simply because they did not know the owner's name. Everything that I had been taught protested.

"Why, yes, little simpleton," he replied. "Every one takes his own in the world. Do you like this bit of land? It is yours,— like the sun that warms us, the air that we breath, the loveliness of these early spring days."

I was not convinced. Dim resistances awoke within me, shivering; I found no words to express them, and could only bring forward the poor objection:

"Yes, but I couldn't take anything from it."

"You take your pleasure from it, that's the important thing."

Confident of victory, he clinched it by invoking the testimony of a third party.

"Jean-Jacques would explain to you better than I can, that nature holds within itself the happiness of man. Jean-Jacques would have loved this retreat."

He uttered the name *Jean-Jacques* with devout unction, pursing his lips. He spoke of him as Aunt Deen spoke of the best known and most useful saints, Saint Christopher, for example, who protects against accidents, or Saint Antony, who helps to find lost objects. Puzzled, I at once asked:

"Who is that — Jean-Jacques?"

"A friend; a friend whom you do not know."

Why, I knew, or thought I knew, all grandfather's friends. He received few visits, mostly from other old men, who appeared older than he, who seemed to be sad and who soon bored him. There was one who would sit down without saying a word, and would just sit a long time, motionless and mute. One day grandfather forgot that he was there and left the room. On his return he found him in the same place, fast asleep. Grandfather would complain openly about the visits of all these "old fogies" as he called them, not one of whom, I was certain, was named Jean-Jacques. On the other hand, he always liked to come down to the drawing-room when he thought he might meet ladies there.

Time pressing, we returned through the chestnut grove, but went out on another side, passing through a second hedge, this one of young acacias. It was with manifest pleasure that I saw houses and cultivated fields again.

"Come! here are private properties for you," said grandfather when we reached the cultivated grounds.

His lips curled with disdain. Not at all disconcerted I asked for landmarks.

"Where is ours?"

"I don't know. Look over there, at the left. You'll see it all right as we go on. As for me, when I take a walk I go where fancy leads me. One always gets home somehow."

When we reached the highroad a strange and disquieting apparition presented itself. I clung to my new preceptor:

"Grandfather, look up the road!"

It seemed to be coming toward us from over the hill, with a slow uniform motion. In a few minutes it would be here. Grandfather shaded his eyes with his hands, the better to concentrate his vision, and explained the phenomenon:

"It's the sheep that leave Provence every spring and go up to the high pastures. They are led there by easy stages. Let us get to the side of the road, beyond this pile of stones, and watch them go past."

Thus instructed, I was soon able to distinguish between the almost white road and the yellow-grey and brown flock which composed a single moving mass,— repeated above all those regularly swaying backs by a thin cloud of dust which spread over the fields on either side. At once I saw again the picture in my Bible which showed Abraham travelling to the land of Canaan.

In front of the flock marched a shepherd, wrapped

in a great cape which must have been many a time exposed to wind and rain, for it was of the greenish colour of a thatched roof over which many winters have passed. Notwithstanding the sun, his ample covering appeared not to inconvenience him. No doubt our sun was not as warm as that which he had left behind. His hat pulled down over his eyes cast a dark shadow over the upper part of his face, only his grey beard being distinctly visible. He was an old man, and he advanced slowly with a slight swaying of the whole body. He might have been taken for a beggar but for an unconscious air of majesty which covered him like his cloak — that of a captain leading his company, that of a sower sowing his seed. He took no one step faster than another, and the rhythm of his regular advance seemed to communicate itself to the entire column. It gave an impression as of the whole landscape following, obeying in cadence a law which he fixed, the oxen tracing the furrows, the reapers laying bare the fields, the morning and the evening obedient to the time of returning, and even the stars at night traversing, unhastingly, a part of the sky which I had thought I could see moving in grandfather's spy-glass.

He seemed to me so important that I bowed to him, but he did not return my salutation, nor deign to detach his attention from his absorbing task. Grandfather began a sentence:

"Tell me, shepherd . . ." but deemed it useless

to go on, recognising the intense seriousness of the man.

A black dog walked almost under his feet, and behind came, in a triangular group, three lean, hairless donkeys, laden with objects which could not be seen since they were covered with an awning. Their heads hung almost to the ground as if they would fain have snuffed it up, or browsed upon it. The main body of the army followed them, the sheep-people, crowding close to one another, eight or ten in a row when one could manage to count them, but most of the time the rows were indistinct, subject to flux and reflux, the great mass of wool undulating as if it were that of a single rampant and interminable animal, over which continual shivers passed.

I did not at first distinguish anything in this uniform and agitated mass. Then I noticed little black spots that were ears. By degrees, as I got used to them, certain individualities emerged from the compact, monotonous throng. There were rams, generally taller, with long horns rolled in a circle, and bells hanging from their necks by a wooden horseshoe shaped collar. There were sheep with white or black coats, better cared for than the others, walking with a certain ostentation. There were also vagabond animals, capricious as goats, which would gladly have escaped from the road but for the vigilance of the dogs that operated on the flanks of the procession, long-haired grey dogs, with

eyes shining from cavernous depths under overhanging brows, attentive and active, not to be by any means distracted from their duty as sergeants. One of the sheep climbed upon the stones that protected us, and was immediately imitated by several of her companions. One of the guardians, open-mouthed, cut short the escapade, and forced them to return to their proper place.

They passed and they passed. I thought they would never be done, estimating their number at several thousands. Perhaps there really were three or four hundred of them. At last the flood slackened, the ranks grew thinner, seven or eight isolated sheep closed the procession. Last of all came the rear-guard, composed of four pack mules and a second shepherd, less august and solemn than the first. When he had come opposite us grandfather, grown braver, put the question to which the other one had paid no heed:

"Well, shepherd, where are you going like that?"

He was a young man, supple, thin and muscular, wearing a short jacket, red sash, and hat on the back of his head,— one who cared neither for heat nor cold. His bronzed face was exposed to the full rays of the sun. He was whistling to pass away the time, and smiling while he whistled, as if he enjoyed his music — though perhaps it was the curve of his lips that made him look as if he were smiling.

At grandfather's question he burst into a frank laugh; his teeth shone between his lips — such teeth

as I had seen in wolves or other wild beasts in a menagerie to which I was once taken. He simply replied:

"To the mountain."

How strange the resonance that certain syllables have for us! He might have designated by its name the mountain where his flocks were to pasture, and I should not have noticed it, but the unexpected lack of precision communicated to me by some sorcery a longing for the heights. It attacked me as suddenly and unexpectedly as a lightning shock. I had not felt the charm of the wild, bare place from which I was returning with grandfather; but now I was not only instantaneously initiated into it,— I augmented its wildness and isolation. I felt upon my brow a colder, sterner breath, the wind of summits which I had never seen. Later in my life poems and symphonies have given me this imaginary sensation, though more faintly. In each discovery that it makes the heart, like a virgin, gives of its freshness.

Before the passing of the sheep I had managed to discover where we were. Notwithstanding its surrounding trees, I had proudly recognised the house below us in the edge of the town. It had always appeared very large to me, vast as a kingdom, and now I seemed to find it small and insignificant, simply because I had heard within me the music of three words, "To the mountain."

A few years later it was my lot to climb over mountains, those that are covered with pines and

larches, and those whose only vegetation is ice, those that are carpeted with grass, soft as rosy flesh, those that are all bone and muscle, like Michel Angelo's figures, and again those whose treacherous whiteness only loses its immobility under the warming glow of the setting sun. They have taught me patience, calmness, and perhaps also contempt, though one of the most difficult of Christian precepts obliges us to despise no man. There I have met and tasted by turns war and peace, struggle and serenity, the intoxication of solitude and the glory of conquest in the blinding splendour of the snow. They have never given me anything that was not contained in germ in the shepherd's reply.

On our return home, when we opened the gate, there were Tem Bossette and his two acolytes digging, their faces bent on the ground. One of them having perceived us, they rested with one accord, sure of our complicity.

Aunt Deen congratulated me on my red cheeks; mother thanked grandfather for his care of me. Father asked:

"Did you enjoy it?" and rejoiced when I answered in the affirmative. No one suspected, I least of all, that that little boy, till then contented, and never dreaming of anything outside of The House, had brought *desire* home with him from his walk.

III

THE DISCOVERY OF THE EARTH

THAT period of my life is quite luminous in my memory: only later it seems as if the sun must have been a little dimmed. I walked out with grandfather morning and evening, I came into closer relations with nature, and I had a new suit of clothes. It was the first. Up to that time I had worn those of my elder brothers cut down to fit me. A seamstress used to come to the house to alter and mend the garments destined for me. She was as homely as heart could wish, and had been recommended by Mlle Tapinois, who flattered herself that she had formed her in her workrooms.

I had grown rapidly during my illness. What was then my surprise when I was informed that a tailor, a real tailor, was coming to take my measures, mine, not Bernard's nor Stephen's! The tailor's name was Plumeau. Tall and thin as a lath, he floated in an immense frock coat. Did he propose, like God when he created man, to make me in his own image and after his likeness? He fabricated for me a full suit of olive green which emphasised my leanness, to which end he had neglected nothing. The coat, rivalling an overcoat, reached to my knees;

the cloth was of a solidity calculated to defy time. It was very evident that I had a suit that would last till I took my baccalaureate. I somehow had the impression that it favoured me too much, and my vanity rebelled. The whole family had been summoned to see me in my new suit, and ratify its acceptance. I was constrained to turn round and round like a horse in the market, and my rebellious face became almost as long as my coat.

"It will do," father finally pronounced.

It would do? Yes, in two or three years, when I had grown a great deal more. Mother was cautious about speaking too approvingly. My brothers kept silence, but I perceived that they were smothering their laughter, a self-denial which Louise by no means exercised. Aunt Deen saved the situation which was becoming painful. She arrived late upon the scene, for she had been putting to rights in the tower chamber when notified of the arrival of M. Plumeau. We heard her on the stairs before we saw her. Hope at once revived. Her coming was like the arrival of fresh troops upon the field of battle — she decided the fortunes of the day.

Hardly had she perceived me, lost in my new suit, when she cried:

"It's admirable, Francis; I won't keep it from you; never have I seen any one so becomingly dressed."

Every one drew a long breath and I was comforted; so greatly, indeed, that, unwilling to part

with my fine garments, I put them on for our next walk. Grandfather did not notice. But at the gate Aunt Deen overtook us all out of breath.

"Naughty boy!" she exclaimed, "putting on your best clothes for a walk!"

She almost undressed me with her own hands in the street; I must needs go back to the house under her escort, to exchange my costume for less distinguished raiment, and the walk that day was spoiled. But those that came afterward made it up to me.

There was the forest and there was the lake. . . .

The forest, with certain farms and vineyards, made part of a historic domain, the château of which, after enduring sieges and entertaining great personages of the army or the church, was half in ruins and no longer habitable. The whole property belonged to a retired colonel of cavalry, son of a Baron of the Empire, whose fortune not being sufficient to keep it up decently, he was permitting it to fall into decay. He lived alone and spent the whole day riding about on one or another of his old horses, without ever going beyond his estate. Though it was entirely surrounded with a wall grandfather and I used to find our way in by breaches which we had discovered.

He led me about among the trees, taught me to distinguish their characteristics, and encouraged me to sit down under their shade, on the moss and not on the treacherous benches which we perceived

sparsely scattered here and there, the woodwork of which was rotten with damp. Grass was growing in the alleys, which under over-arching trees guided the gaze to portals of light, that seemed on one side to be blue, because of the lake which they framed in.

It was the month of June. A thousand tones of green were mingling, marrying, all around us, from the pale green of the parasite mistletoe to the almost black of the ivy which climbed the oak trunks. Spring was singing its whole gamut around us. And under the trees there still remained heaps of red leaves, vestiges of the former season.

I felt a vague fear at being thus alone, we two, amidst so imposing and silent an assembly, and I tried to talk, in order to make our presence there seem more real.

"Hush!" said grandfather; "be still and listen."

Listen to what? And yet, little by little, I began to perceive a multitude of soft sounds. We were no longer alone, as I had thought; innumerable living things were all around us.

Far away two chaffinches were calling to one another at regular intervals. The more distant one took up softly the couplet which the other was pouring forth from a full throat. From tree to tree the latter drew nearer. I saw him, my eye met his — so little and round! As I did not stir, he remained. But what could be those dull, reiterated blows? Woodpeckers, tapping the trunks with their bills.

Long bands of light glided here and there between

the branches and lay upon the ground; in their rays, which brought out the shapes of the leaves, spiders' webs were swinging, their finest threads plain to see, and wasps, buzzing as they flew about. At last I could even hear the rustling of the grass; — the secret labour of the earth under the influence of heat. I was discovering a life of which I had never dreamed.

"What is that call, grandfather?" I asked in a low tone.

"It must be a hare; let's hide, and perhaps, if you are very quiet, we shall see it before long."

Upon this dialogue we softly dragged ourselves behind a bush. I knew hares only from having eaten of them on rare occasions of ceremony, though Aunt Deen deplored giving rabbit to children, because of the soiling of napkins and faces. The cry sounded again — nearer us this time.

"He is calling his doe," whispered grandfather.

"His doe?"

"Yes, his wife. Be quiet."

It was a gentle call, infinitely tender and languishing. Far away we heard another call, like it, but hardly audible. From opposite sides of the forest the duet went on; and I began to understand that animals, like people, love to see and talk to one another. Suddenly, before me, crossing the path, I saw two long ears and a little ball of a brown body which seemed to bound over it. At the very edge the hare stopped, hearkened to the distant, guiding voice, once again uttered his heartbreaking cry,

and disappeared in the neighbouring underbrush. He was hastening to join his mate, but I had had time to see him quite plainly.

Another time it was a fox. He must have scented us with his pointed muzzle, for he fled at top speed, his tail between his legs. Being learned in such matters through La Fontaine's fables, and the "Scenes in Animal Life," I informed grandfather that this was a plot and it would be well for us to make off.

"How stupid you are!" he exclaimed. "The fox is harmless."

At which I was somewhat scandalised. But our walks were not always calm to this degree. From our favourite nook we sometimes heard, like a heavy rain, the galloping of a horse, and we would hardly manage to hide behind the trunk of a beech, when the colonel would appear, on horse-back. He had a short nose, a stiff moustache and hollow cheeks. He sat upright, knees out, looking at nothing, and as he passed he seemed to me a fearful man. Grandfather hastened to reassure me,

"He's an old beast," he said, "and his mount can't trot any longer."

I later learned that both had fought at Reichhoffen.

But on a graver occasion grandfather himself gave the signal for retreat. I saw him cock his ear after the fashion of the hare, then rise hastily from the grass on which we were sitting.

"Dogs," he murmured, fearfully. "Let's go."

We made for the wall as fast as his old legs and my too-new ones would permit. The dogs were already rushing upon us, barking and threatening, when grandfather, who had pushed me before him, reached the top. The alarm had agitated him and our safety by no means pacified him.

"Pretty proprietors!" he fulminated; "a little more and their dogs would have devoured us!"

Their ferocity furnished him the material for a lesson; he turned toward me:

"You see, my boy, men become wicked in towns, like apples that rot when they are heaped together. And then they turn round and pervert animals!"

In truth I could have brought forward two opposing arguments; the isolation of their estate and the ferocious nature of their beasts. He granted only the second, and overturned that in the next breath:

"You have seen the chaffinch, the hare and the fox. In their natural state they are incapable of doing harm. Tamed, all beasts sooner or later become dangerous, perfidious, ferocious and false. Well! it's just the same with men! Free, they are kind and generous. Brutalised by discipline, like that old soldier, they become terrific!"

Never had he spoken so much at length, nor, to my mind, so enigmatically. No doubt the emotion caused by the dogs had made him forget, in a direct way, the promise my father had exacted from him. I was surprised at his eloquence, for which

nothing had prepared me, and I at once drew practical conclusions from it. I had been brought up to believe in the benefits of authority; that of parents and school teachers. And now it appeared that to be good one must obey nobody.

This adventure disgusted us with "our" forest, and we frequented less extensive and more peaceful pieces of woods, preferably those situated on the communal lands, all the more agreeable to grandfather because of his hatred of private property. According to him, property was the great obstacle to human happiness, but I hesitated to adopt his views; I was pretty fond of owning things — for which he cared not at all.

As he had promised at the time of our first walk, he communicated to me his knowledge of mushrooms, the round-stemmed fleshy bolet, its dome the colour of a not quite ripe chestnut, the laseras, most beautiful of mushrooms, like an egg of which the shell has just been broken, the yellow, flower-shaped chanterelle were his favourites. I saw him bite, like the priest whose story he had told me, one of those Satan bolets, which turns blue when it is cut, the gash at once taking on the appearance of a frightful wound. Taught by Aunt Deen's contagious fears, I was persuaded that his lips also would soon turn blue. I gazed at him all terror and curiosity, seeking for the symptoms of danger. But he digested his poison with marvellous ease.

"You see," he observed in triumph, "the worthy

priest for once was right. Nature is a mother to us."

Emboldened by this experiment, I gathered from the bushes some red berries that were very pleasing to the eye, but which gave me a sharp colic. Grandfather must be a bit of a sorcerer.

If ever we brought home from our hunt a handkerchief full of cryptogams, Aunt Deen, suspicious, would not fail to cry out:

"Those horrors again!"

She would look them over most carefully, keeping only those that were notoriously good to eat; she excelled in cooking them in butter, or preparing them as an hors-d'œuvre, with a sauce of wine, salt, pepper and herbs, and a dash of vinegar. Thus prepared the little balls, fresh, white and crisp, melted in the mouth. Now that I gathered them I, too, began to eat them.

I avenged myself of my hurtful berries by the strawberries and whortleberries that I found among the moss. I loved to fill my hand with them and then lick them up as goats do salt when it is given them. It is true that indigestible things had been forbidden me; the notion of duty was beginning to change in me, and I preferred to trust to that mother nature so much praised by grandfather, and whom he only had to invoke to be fed to heart's content. Grandfather was constantly lauding her, offering to her litanies of eulogiums. And yet he ridiculed the chaplet that Aunt Deen and mother used to recite!

And he took every opportunity to instil into me an aversion to towns and love for the delights of the fields. Cities, he said, were full of ferocious, greedy folk, who would murder you for a piece of money, whereas in a village men lived peaceful and happy, and loved one another with brotherly love.

One day a peasant invited us into his half ruined arbour to eat one of those white cheeses over which they pour sweet cream. A bowl of wood strawberries accompanied this frugal and innocent repast. They made so delicious a mixture that I was inclined to believe blindly in universal happiness, provided, indeed, that every one would consent to leave the plague and leprosy infected city. In the country every one was kind, obliging and free into the bargain. We would have no more enemies. Aunt Deen's *they* existed only in her old-woman's imagination. Her ideas were narrow, she did not, like grandfather, rise above petty, everyday cares. I was peaceful, devout, disarmed. And now I knew the flower of rural pleasure, of which I have never lost the flavour.

"Stuff yourselves," said our host genially; "the doctor cured me of chills and fever."

We owed his kindliness to my father, but we preferred to suppose it the usual thing by way of verification of our theories. Having stuffed myself only too well, in fact, I suffered from indigestion on the way home, aggravated by grandfather's unkindly humour.

"You will not boast of this," he observed, when I was relieved.

I understood the significance of his advice, and resolved to preserve a prudent silence which would shield us in any whim we might indulge in future excursions. We reached home late: the want of punctuality seemed to me an elegant indifference. Why dine at one hour rather than at another? One could even do without dinner entirely, if one's stomach was full of white cheese and cream. Grandfather explained where we had been and extolled peasant hospitality in choice terms.

"Ah, yes," cried father, "you happened upon that rascal Barbeau. I think I did save him from death. He lives mostly by poaching and smuggling and owes me his bill yet. I am just as willing he should not pay it. The colour of his money is not clean."

I considered that he was too severe upon so polite and generous a man. We went again to visit Barbeau, and were received by his wife. She was an aged, grey, gnarled, blear-eyed woman, who found nothing better to offer us than a miserable crust of gruyère cheese, which greatly vexed us. She said nothing as to her husband's occupation but pursed up her lips to confide to us the fine places that her sons enjoyed. The eldest was postman in town, the second an employé at the railway station, and as for the third, oho! he was earning thousands and hundreds.

"Waiter in a hotel in Paris, Monsieur Rambert, waiter in a furnished hotel. He sends us money."

"Bad trade," observed grandfather.

"There is no bad trade," insisted the old woman. "The one thing is to get money."

"And you have none left?"

"Surely not,— there is none left. There is nobody any more who eats chestnuts and drinks cider, Monsieur Rambert. As for the land, see! I spit upon it!"

And the old hag did in fact spit upon the growing grain, now a pale green about to change to gold, which grew close around her hovel. One would have said that she was banning all the countryside.

It did not occur to me that this grain was the flour which at our house was blessed before being kneaded into dough, the bread which my father never cut before tracing upon the loaf the sign of the cross. All I saw was a disgusting act and involuntarily I laid down my share of the cheese which I had been eating without pleasure.

"Let's go," said grandfather abruptly.

Mother Barbeau's remarks vexed him. At least I had no attack of nausea this time.

After this conversation he abandoned agricultural life for a time and decided to take me to the lake which we had not yet explored. He led me thither with no enthusiasm.

"It is a closed-in water," he said contemptuously.

Were there open waters then? Of course — there was the sea. Until now the word had not impressed me and I attributed no meaning to it. When the mist hid the opposite shore the lake used to seem endless, and I had heard people around me say, "it's like the sea." I had paid no attention. Grandfather's disdainful description brought to my imagination by contrast a free immensity. Later, when at last I saw the sea — it was at Dieppe, from the top of the cliff — I felt no surprise. It was simply an open water.

"Would you like a row?" grandfather asked one day.

Would I! I desired it all the more because such an expedition represented to me in some sort a substitution of the individual life for the family life. My parents had forbidden me to go out in a boat, after the fall into the water which had brought on my pleurisy. They were afraid both of the dampness and of my awkwardness. Once again, then, I was *the fair child who had escaped from his mother's arms.* The *maiden with golden wings* who enticed me was my own good pleasure.

We took a canoe and rowed out of the port. Grandfather, who used the oars irregularly (which by no means reassured me), soon laid them down and left us to float.

"Where are we going?" I asked, somewhat uneasily.

"I don't know."

Uncertainty increased the mystery of the water. I amused myself with leaning over the gunwale, and dipping my hands in the water. The cold caress it gave me and the small danger we were encountering, or which I thought we were encountering, gave me a mingled but very exciting sensation.

What was the meaning of these brief flashes of silver which were lighted on the surface and at once went out? Around their dying spark a circle appeared, which grew ever larger and finally was lost. It was made by fish which came up to breathe. One of them, quite near, showed his little mouth and the shining scales on his head. I had come into contact with a new world — the submarine world.

When the wind began to blow grandfather would make me sit in the bottom of the boat, upon the boards, which would be pretty wet. From thence, being still not tall, I could perceive nothing but the sky. I could the better discern its dome and on fine days the continuous vibration of the ether. While grandfather was dreaming I would sit there motionless and happy. I formed the habit of being excessively happy without knowing why, as if existence had no limits and no purpose.

Grandfather made friends also with the fishermen who were setting their nets.

"They are good fellows," he would say; "the lake is like the country. As man leaves the city he approaches the happy state of nature."

We came to know the manners of the trout, the perch, the voracious pike and the char, the flesh of which is as savoury as the pink flesh of the salmon.

"Aha!" said one of these artless fishermen joyfully, "all my char is engaged by the Bellevue Hotel. We rake it in night and day. They are the customers for my money."

Thus was I initiated into the life of the land and the water. Grandfather began to be interested in my progress in the friendship of nature. He had a disciple whom he had not sought. I was the first now to turn my back upon the town, leap over walls, cross the fields without the slightest care for the crops. He treated me as an heir, or a child worthy of being one of those sluggard kings who possess the world. And one hot day in July, after we had painfully climbed a hillock whence one could overlook the plain, the forest and the lake, he began to laugh at a notion that had occurred to him.

"You know, my boy, they think I have nothing, that I am just one of those clatter-clogs that shuffle along the road with a tramp's bundle on his back. What a joke! There is no landed proprietor richer than I — do you hear?"

His words did not surprise me. I had lost that notion of *mine* and *thine* that divides riches from poverty.

"This water, these woods, these fields," he went on, "all these are mine. I never take any care of

them, and they are mine all the same." And like an act of investiture he laid his hand upon my head, saying:

"They are mine; I give them to you."

It was a playful, unceremonious presentation. Both of us amused ourselves with the idea. And yet, in spite of our laughter, I had a very clear impression that the world did in fact belong to me. I would no longer consent to have a small, narrow place in the world.

As we were going down from our hilltop we met upon the road a young woman who lived in a villa in the neighbourhood. She wore a white gown which left her forearms and neck bare, and on her head was a hat decorated with red cherries. Her parasol, a little behind her, made an aureola or background for a face which was as clear cut and delicate as one of those magnolia flowers in the garden that I loved for their colour, odour and form as of white birds with outspread wings. Still I should not have noticed her if grandfather had not stopped, riveted to the spot with admiration, and exclaimed aloud, "How lovely she is!"

The fair face crimsoned. But the young woman smiled at the too direct homage. I looked at her then, and so fixedly that I have never forgotten that vision, not even the cherries. But I made my reservations. To me she seemed already old, perhaps thirty. That is an advanced age in the pitiless eyes of a child. Her flower-like complexion made me

think of that avowal of the nightingale from which one day when I was reading the "Scenes in Animal Life," I had drawn a fitful melancholy: *I am in love with the Rose — I strain my throat all the night long for her, but she sleeps, and hears me not.* And for the first time, and not without a secret anticipation, I associated an unknown woman with a yet more unknown love.

After this incident grandfather led me to a wooded slope where we had never been, and which he had represented to me as without interest when I proposed it as the object of a walk. We had to cross a little brook before reaching its foot. On the way he was self-absorbed and said not a word. At the top he turned to the east and led the way directly to a pavilion near a farm house but half-hidden in a clearing.

"There it is," he said.

I understood that he was not speaking to me. This pavilion, one story above the ground floor, appeared to be in a miserable condition. The roof lacked slates, a surrounding gallery was rotting away. It must have been long since abandoned. Grandfather delighted in its ruinous and uninhabitable condition,— a thing which would have surprised me more if I had not grown accustomed to his whims.

"So much the better," he murmured; "there is no one there."

Returning to the farmhouse he perceived an old man who was warming himself upon a bench in the sun and dipping soup from a pot with a wooden spoon. With this old man he entered upon an interminable conversation which bored me, but which ended in some questions as to the pavilion.

"It is good for nothing but firewood," said the peasant.

"There were people in it formerly," insinuated grandfather.

"Formerly — a good many years ago."

Grandfather appeared to hesitate as to continuing the conversation, but then resumed:

"Yes — a good many years ago. But you and I were not born to-day. Tell me, don't you remember a lady?"

I at once thought of the lady in white with the cherries in her hat, and I summed up her figure in that clearing, at the door of the pavilion. My imagination was already at work upon this new theme.

"Oh," said the old man, before swallowing the spoonful that he held in his hand —"as for women, I despise them."

A gleam of rage shot across grandfather's eyes, and I thought he was going to overset the old man and his pot. He at once cut short the conversation without another word. But as he turned away he took me to witness the beauty of the place.

"All the same, it's sweet and wild here. The trees have hardly changed. They are all that is left."

I never learned the adventure of the pavilion. But one day when we were passing the colonel's tottering château another memory, less direct no doubt, awoke in his mind and without preparation he began:

"They called her the beautiful Alixe."

"Who, grandfather?"

"She lived there. It was under the Empire."

"You saw her, grandfather?"

"Oh, I; no! That's too long ago. I am speaking of the first Emperor. Those who had seen her were old when I was young. Those who had seen her were bursting with pride merely at mentioning her name."

These brief evocations of the past threw for me a lovely veil of romance over our walks, which had "*happened*," like history.

He never said more about either, as I expected him to do. He never supposed that I was watching his slightest words, and exaggerating their importance. Save the white lady with the cherries in her hat, who perhaps resembled, who doubtless resembled, some far-away picture of his past, he greeted women the most frankly in the world and never made any remark about them. When, several years later, one evening at school, I read the famous passage of the Iliad about the old men of Troy being disposed to forgive Helen because of her beauty, like that of the immortal goddesses, while my comrades were dozing over their Homer, I was seeing myself once more

at my grandfather's side on the road by which the lady in white came to us. And ever since I have called that unknown one Helen.

Grandfather, who began to enjoy our friendship, consented to receive me in the tower chamber. He took no notice of my presence, however, now enveloping me with the smoke of his pipe, and again playing upon his violin, the notes of which mingled in my mind with the forest, the lake and all our secret retreats. That room was to me a continuation of my free out-of-door life. On stormy days, very rare in the course of that bright summer predicted by Mathieu de la Drôme, I used to watch the falling rain and the changing skies, lulled and softened by this spectacle of the uselessness of things. When the west was clear I could see the sun shooting into the waters of the lake a pillar of fire, which by degrees was changed into a sword and finally was reduced to a golden point, the reflection of the star resting upon the shoulder of the mountain, which was what the sun became for one second before it disappeared. In the evenings, after dinner, I used to obtain the favour of looking at the constellations through the telescope. As his former room had faced the south, grandfather, as I have said, was acquainted with only half the heavens, and refused to puzzle out the other half. Therefore I knew only Altair and Vega, Arcturus and the Virgin's sheaf, which may be seen in the south in July. I was

obliged to lean out to distinguish Antares on the edge of the roof. The other months all is confused to my eyes, and the same if I look toward the north.

The household was pleased with my new regimen. More than once father asked of grandfather:

"Truly, the boy doesn't inconvenience you?"

"Oh, not at all," grandfather would invariably reply.

And father would express his gratitude for my recovered health, Aunt Deen would declare that I no longer had my papier-mâché face, and would rub my cheeks to make them redder. My mother saw in grandfather's affection a guarantee of peace and reconciliation. As for me, life had been insensibly changed. School, lessons, emulation, regular hours, work — all that no longer existed. I had only to turn my back upon the town and give myself up to lovely nature. I felt that, though I cannot explain it, at once clearly and confusedly: confusedly in my mind and clearly as a matter of practice.

And yet, on our return from our walks, grandfather would pretty often simply bring me back as far as the gate, and slip away in the direction of the accursed city.

IV

THE CAFÉ OF THE NAVIGATORS

WHERE did grandfather go after bringing me back to the house? To the café, and one day he took me there.

I did not know precisely what a café was, and I was secretly afraid of it. Father used to speak of cafés in a tone of contempt which admitted no contradiction, no favourable reservation. When he said of any one, "he spends his time at the café," or "he is a pillar of the café," that some one was judged and condemned: he wasn't worth the rope to hang him. I could not have imagined my father entering one. Such audacity on the part of grandfather surprised me the less, since I had already noticed that in everything he took the opposite view from my father.

We went to the café instead of going to walk, one very warm morning; this seemed to me a sort of outrage, as we were doubly failing in the course marked out for us. Its name appeared in letters of gold, *Café of the Navigators;* the inscription being framed in with billiard cues. Pleasantly situated on the shore of the lake, it was composed of a long arbour whence one could see the port, and a

great room whence one could see nothing. We chose the room; to me it seemed most luxurious because of its mirrors and white marble tables. Two or three groups were conversing, smoking, drinking, and I was at once nearly choked by a pungent odour of tobacco mingled with the perfume of anisette. Yet such was the attraction of the place that after having coughed I found the combination pleasant. We joined the least noisy group, who greeted grandfather with transports of delight, calling him familiarly *Father Rambert:*

Father Rambert here! — Father Rambert there!

They installed him on the sofa, in the middle seat, and began by asking news of Mathieu de la Drôme. Grandfather replied that he was at "set fair" with a tendency to rise, and that favourable winds would probably keep him so; at which every one rejoiced, on account of the vines; the wine would be famous if Mathieu continued to behave well. Presently I perceived that the barometer was in question, and that grandfather was consulted as to the weather because of its prophecies. These gentlemen used among themselves a conventional language to which it was important to have the key, and which complicated the conversation so far as I was concerned. No one paid any attention to me, and I was still standing, vexed at this neglect, when I was suddenly addressed.

"Well, youngster, what will *you* take?"

The appellative and the familiar tone com-

pleted my displeasure. I drew myself up, and put on a stern expression, but I remained "the youngster" to every one present. Grandfather with a detached air replied with majesty:

"A green."

"With white wine?" somebody asked.

"I am not a wine sack like you," retorted grandfather.

The reply was received with enthusiasm. At The House every one was particularly polite to a guest, but these gentlemen here laid aside all ceremony in their mutual relations. Meanwhile, the maid set before grandfather a number of things which she took one by one from a tray: a tall, deep glass, a little iron spade pierced with holes; a sugar bowl, a caraffe of water, and finally a bottle, the contents of which I could not guess. There was a deep silence and I received an impression of being present at a solemn rite, which no one might disturb. Decidedly their ways were all topsy-turvy: they treated one another without courtesy, but they venerated the drink.

Grandfather, his calm not in the least embarrassed by all the eyes fixed upon him, poured a quarter of a glass of liquid from the mysterious bottle, then placed the perforated spade across the glass and upon it two pieces of sugar in perfect equilibrium, moistened them drop by drop until they dissolved, after which he suddenly inclined the caraffe. A pleasant odour of anise caressed my

nostrils. The mixture grew more clouded as the water fell, like those beautiful opaque clouds that lie along the horizon before the rain, and finally took on a pale green tint which I had never met in our walks. Immediately the talking began again: the operation was completed.

At my new guardian's order they brought "the youngster" a grenadine with a bottle of seltzer water. The rite observed in this case was shorter and not of sufficient importance to overcome the general indifference. The rival "green" enjoyed a particular celebrity. One discharge from the seltzer bottle into the syrup which was languishing in the bottom of the glass and my mixture rose up, frothy, boiling, tossing, first light rose colour, then, after the gases had been dissipated, a golden rose. What touched me most was the straw that was given me for imbibing it from a distance: one had only to bend the head over and breathe it in.

Merely by that breath I was initiated into a higher form of existence. Perfectly happy, I felt a great desire to tell my neighbours so. They were sucking up divers concoctions. Most of them had kindly, rubicund faces, and eyes somewhat bleared. They too were all perfectly happy. Why had grandfather taught me that people in towns were not happy? To become so, all they had to do was to go to the café.

Among the heads which I was examining at leisure and with entire sympathy was one which I thought

I knew. It belonged to grandfather's left-hand neighbour, the very one whom he had qualified as a wine-sack. The face was sprinkled with red spots, which, however, were hardly to be distinguished from his blood-shot skin. Hair, beard and skin were all of the same red colour which overspread his entire head, even threatening the nose, which, the central point of the spectacle, shone resplendent. In spite of myself I thought of the picture in my Bible where the prophet Elijah is being carried by a chariot of fire into the glory of the setting sun; but I repelled the comparison as unseemly. Where could I have seen that incandescent head? By degrees my memories cleared themselves up. It had happened at our house: a man had come out from the consulting room, not proud and flaming like him of the café, but abashed, pitiful, discomfited. Yet it must have been the same: that hairy skin, those red blotches. I could not be mistaken. Father was escorting him out, and trying to encourage him, saying, as he tapped him on the shoulder:

"Keep your money, friend. You are in a sense a part of the house. Your parents and mine said thou to one another. But you must quit drinking at any cost. Promise me never again to set your foot in a café."

"I swear to you I won't, doctor."

"Don't swear, but hold out."

"Yes, yes. I swear to you. Never in my life shall I be seen in a wineshop."

And yet here he was, drinking and laughing, and as healthy as possible. Father was certainly too severe. Forgetting that he had cured me, I inwardly blamed him for frightening people, finding in him a certain hardness of heart. Why should he wish to deprive this good fellow of his pleasure?

My rubicund friend answered to the name of Casenave, but he was generally called by a symbolical nickname — nothing other than "Pour-the-drink," which might serve a double purpose. "Pour-the-drink" at once won my heart by the surprising adventures through which he had passed: stories of which he most unaffectedly poured forth. He might have figured in the narratives of the "Three Old Mariners," in which case his weight would assuredly have assured Jeremy's descent into the jaws of the tiger. Having in his youth learned through the newspapers of the idleness and good cheer which inhered in the monkish estate, he resolved to adopt it, and presented himself at the door of a Capuchin monastery, where he soon learned to moderate his hopes. To be routed out in the night by a barbarous brother to take part in singing the service, to be fed on vegetables half cooked by a brother suffering from incurable catarrh, made him grow thin and waste away. His ingenuity alone saved him from a still greater disaster. When the monks, placed in a circle, were invited to inflict the discipline upon one another, piously reciting the penitential psalms the while, he managed to get his rope so entangled

in that of his nearest fellow-sufferer that while they were deliberately disentangling them "the '*miserere*' ran along."

But the prior declined to keep him, and generously restored him to civil life. He there formed the most brilliant relations, which he proved to the admiring listeners by telling of the beautiful women who came every evening to visit him in his modest abode. They used to come down through the ceiling, in which, however, no aperture was afterward visible. One moment he was alone, the next, there they were in silk gowns and hoop skirts, for they still adhered to the fashions of the Second Empire. Far from remaining inactive, they would put into his hands a bowl of reasonable dimensions, into which, bending their arms, they would empty — *fz-z-z-z!* — several bottles of champagne. This *fz-z-z-z*, which expressed the flowing of the wine into the bowl, took upon his lips a caressing, musical sound. One could almost hear the pop of the cork and the bubbling out of the froth.

He imparted to us still more astounding biographical details. One night, mistaking the gas light in the street for his candle, he had sprung out of the window to blow it out, and had been picked up in his nightshirt somewhat bruised but safe and sound. And had he not a double who walked out with him? Only the evening before he had had a long and most interesting conversation with his double, who never left him till they had returned to the outskirts of

the town, when he bade him good-bye till next time.

Every one listened without interrupting him, except by signs of approval or requests to go on. Why should I not believe all those marvellous things, when no one around me showed the slightest sign of incredulity?

I did not know the nature of Casenave's business, for he could converse upon all subjects with great competence, and might be supposed to have practised the most diverse industries. Whereas I very soon discovered that two other members of the company — Gallus and Merinos — were distinguished artists. Gallus, the musician, directed his remarks especially to grandfather, as if only they two, in the midst of the general imbecility, could understand one another and fraternise in matters musical. The pair affected to hold themselves apart, though in their asides they appeared to utter only a few brief cabalistic words: understanding thus established, they would roll the whites of their eyes when one or the other alluded to the allegro of the symphony in C minor, the andante of the fourteenth sonata, or the scherzo in B flat of the seventh trio, over which they would clasp one another's hands as if in mutual congratulation, calling it the Archduke Rodolpho's divine trio. No one interrupted them in the state of exultation to which a mere numeral was enough to lift them; at such times indeed every one gazed upon them with respect. From time to time some one would inquire of Gallus, somewhat diffidently, as if

fearful of being pitied for not having used the proper terms:

"How about your lyrical drama on the Death of Olympus?"

"It's getting on," the composer would reply imperturbably.

"How far along are you?"

"Still in the prelude. There is no hurry. A lifetime is hardly long enough for the completion of such a work and I have only been at it some ten years."

It must be a prodigious opera that demanded such efforts! For that matter, one could see, merely by looking at Gallus, that he was breaking down under the weight of so vast an undertaking. His frame was puny, stunted, sickly, like a pear tree that my father had ordered rooted up from the court. A lock of hair fell across his stormy brow, and when he passed his hand through his disorderly locks a shower of scurf would fall upon his shoulders. Though the season was warm he wore a black velvet coat, and around his neck an enormous blue scarf such as women wear, the spots upon which were innumerable. All my aunt's benzine would not have sufficed to clean them. But I told myself that artists could not be expected to dress like other folk,— for if they did they might not be known to be artists. This dirty little man, who looked peaceable enough, would sometimes fall into a fury, and figuratively drag through mud and dirt

by the napes of their necks certain abominable criminals such as Ambroise Thomas, and Gounod, who were guilty of having fraudulently robbed him of public admiration, and irremediably corrupted the public taste. He also brought accusations against the *bourgeois* of our town, whose plots and treacheries he enumerated at length. I observed that the designation *bourgeois* was by itself alone a disgrace, and I trembled at the thought that I was one, and my father also. Only grandfather, stout against being classified, might perhaps be spared. I afterward learned that Gallus was by profession an examiner of weights and measures. In its turn society in general came in for severe condemnation; but that it deserved this I had already learned in the course of my walks with grandfather. And thus I came to know that my new friends of the café, whom I had imagined to be even more fortunate than the peasants with their white cheeses and their fresh cream, were in reality persecuted martyrs.

How could I have the slightest doubt of this in face of the injustice which had befallen the second artist, Merinos? Whether this was his name or a nickname I never knew. If a nickname, it miraculously fitted his mutton face, at once long and full, rosy as the cheeks of a nursing baby, and crowned with curly hair. He vaguely resembled Mariette, our cook, though without her martial aspect. But these somewhat prepossessing features were liable to misconstruction. Merinos was a ravaged soul,

and I caught allusions to the extraordinary passions which he had experienced. Up to this time I had supposed that passion showed itself by a lugubrious face and tearful eyes, but he was shining and jovial, with not a trace of tears in his protruding orbits, though they were plain to see in those of Casenave, Gallus and nearly all the others. Thus my childish imagination found itself nonplussed.

Both Merinos and Gallus had lived long in Paris, in the mysterious Montmartre quarter, of which both spoke as of the promised land. Merinos was a portrait painter, but he had given up painting, a fact for which he gave convincing reasons.

"You understand: now-a-days people make such ridiculous demands. They insist upon a likeness. As if the likeness ever mattered to an artist!"

"That's sure enough," the chorus assented.

My mind at once reverted to the collection of ancestors that covered the walls of the drawing room and that were bad paintings. Assuredly they must be likenesses.

Thus defrauded of glory by the stupidity of the bourgeois, Merinos none the less continued to give evidence of genius. He always carried about with him a piece of coloured paper and a stick of charcoal. While talking and smoking he would carelessly rub his charcoal on the paper, and draw a few lines below the spots thus obtained. It was curious, but when one studied these masterpieces patiently and with good will, one could get a notion of

distorted faces, barely indicated, but which the admiring group recognised as faces in torment, ill disposed folk, disturbers of society. Certain art-lovers in the town — there were some all the same, it seemed — would buy these at a high price, declaring them to be wonderful; and there was an enthusiastic and slender witted lady, who, as every one knew, used regularly to visit Merinos's studio, which, it appeared, was a perfect dog-hole, humbly to gather up his slightest sketches, even going down upon her knees on the floor to hunt them under the furniture. I too admired him, on trust.

One day when grandfather at our house was praising this underrated genius, he brought upon himself this remark from my father:

"Yes, that's the great fad — unfinished works! For my part, I care neither for scaffoldings nor for ruins."

What did he mean by that? I concluded simply that he was incapable of appreciating, as we did, the art of the Café des Navigateurs.

It was the proper thing to maintain a certain distance between these two misunderstood beings and Galurin, who was only a decayed photographer. The latter was no more a stranger to me than Casenave had been. People used to employ him in their houses for this and that supplementary duty, and especially as an extra man at table. As he was once deploring this sort of servitude in our presence grandfather reminded him that Jean-Jacques

had endured the same. The example of Jean-Jacques appeared to soothe his recalcitrant pride. Who in the world was this Jean-Jacques, I wondered.

At our house they had given up taking advantage of Galurin's services after a great dinner at which he was put in charge of the wines, with instructions to name them as he served them. He triumphantly opened the dining-room door, waving the bottle in the air and crying in stentorian tones, "I announce the *Moulin-à-vent*"— an effort which was received with a burst of laughter that wounded him, for he was very sensitive. He abandoned the napkin and became process-server, which coercive though somewhat obscure title seemed to be one of honour. To add to his income he vouchsafed to carry around wedding or funeral invitations when such occasions occurred. One evening, before an important funeral, he forgot himself at the Café of the Navigators, and left the entire parcel of mourning invitations upon the sofa. When he found them it was too late to make his rounds. At once adopting the radical measures which circumstances demanded, he hastened to plunge the compromising parcel in the lake. As the result of this immersion the defunct was obliged to take possession of his last abode in almost complete solitude. Never had such forlorn obsequies been witnessed, and many coolnesses arose among relatives and friends who had not received invitations, and who were not slow to assume that they had been purposely and maliciously neglected.

Galurin used to heap anathemas upon the social system which constrained him to adopt such base industries, the duties of which he performed but capriciously and intermittently. Furthermore, he advocated the partition of all property, for he had nothing of his own.

But the one who cast all others into the shade when he took the floor, who excelled in transposing the incoherent lamentations of Gallus and Merinos and the scatter-brained diatribes of Galurin into the rounded forms of oratorical periods, was Martinod. Martinod, the youngest of all, had a marvellous gift of gravity. Solemn by nature, he wore a long beard and never laughed. One could easily imagine him upon a mausoleum proclaiming the last judgment through a conch-shell. The melancholy that emanated from his entire person enveloped him in all the prestige of a grand funeral, the serious character of which is not to be denied. In the beginning I did not like Martinod. He never looked nice in the face and I suspected him of dark designs. But like all the others I fell under the spell of his utterances. He would begin in a melancholy tone, which would move one to tears. One might suppose him to have but just escaped from a terrible catastrophe. What a beggar he would have made, and how many half-francs he would have extracted from the most tightly closed fists! Then his voice would grow deeper, opening hearts and minds, and from his inexhaustible lips would flow the most resonant har-

monies. He would discant upon the future, a golden age when equality would be the rule in every sphere,— equality of fortune, equality of happiness. Nothing would belong to any one, everything would belong to all. I felt a degree of shame at not understanding very well, because every one else in our group understood and approved. And even at the other tables people would stop drinking and playing cards to listen. The picture which he drew was admirably simple: men in their best clothes praising nature and embracing one another like brothers. Rapt in admiration, I would compare him to my music box, the notes of which made a dancer pirouette upon the cover.

At other times Martinod would be gloomy, bitter and vindictive, heaping threats and sarcasms upon the social fabric of the day, unless it were immediately made over after his ideas. In the name of liberty he would give all Europe over to fire and sword. I would listen in terror, but on the way home grandfather would reassure me.

"He was out of humour to-day. To-morrow the world will go better."

Thus the new and varied society with which I was mingling appeared very different from that in which until then I had been living at home or in school. When we reached the house my cheeks would be full of colour — they thought it was the good country air. Grandfather had no need to counsel me to say

nothing about our visits to the Café of the Navigators. An infallible instinct warned me to say nothing about them at our house. It was a secret between him and me. We were accomplices.

V

THE RELIGIOUS CONTROVERSY

"You are in luck," my brothers would say to me as they prepared to face the dreaded examinations for the baccalaureate, bending from morning till night over their books through all the trying July heat; "no school, no examinations, no possible failures for you."

"And no piano," Louise would add, for having given evidence of an aptitude for music she had been set to work at never-ending five-finger exercises.

Even little James, rebellious under his first lessons in reading and writing, confided to his inseparable Nicola that when he was big he would do like François.

"What does Francis do?" she would ask.

"Nothing."

The month of August drew on without awaking that impatience which its approach had never failed to arouse in me until this year; I even felt a selfish regret as it came nearer. Vacation would rob me of that superiority which convalescence had conferred upon me, and would put me back into my place, the common life. Or rather, I supposed it would do so, being incompetent to measure the chasm that had

opened between the little boy that I had been yesterday, and what I had now become. Some one had measured it before me.

I had become much absorbed between my walks and my visits to the Café of the Navigators, whither grandfather, who was no longer happy without my companionship, was taking me regularly. Though I was rather unobservant of the acts and doings of the family, I again became aware of an atmosphere of anxiety at our house, and of secret conferences that recalled to me the days when the destiny of our property had been at stake.

Father's voice was penetrating, even when he moderated it and believed himself to be speaking softly.

"We shall have no fortune to leave them," he was saying. "We must neglect nothing in their education. They must be armed for life."

We, armed? Why should we be armed? Nothing was easier than life. I had outgrown wooden swords, heroic biographies, epic stories. All I should need would be a few tools for working in the ground, which furnishes men abundantly with all they need. One would harvest so much as was necessary, one would live on white cheese, sweet cream and wild strawberries, and listen to Martinod, preaching universal peace and proclaiming the arrival of the golden age. How simple the programme! What need was there of arms?

Mother was answering father.

"You are right. We must neglect nothing.

Their faith and their union will be their only fortune."

Far from being touched by this declaration of principles, I was imagining the little laugh with which grandfather would meet it, and one morning while combing my hair I practised my face in assuming a satirical expression.

In conversations which I accidentally overheard, the names of Parisian schools or lycées would recur, those especially that prepared boys for the great schools, Stanislas on Postoffice Street, Louis-le-grand or Saint-Louis. My parents would have preferred a religious institution, and in this Aunt Deen emphatically acquiesced.

"No godless school," she would exclaim. "All the rascals come out of the lycées."

"Oho!" grandfather would protest, greatly amused at her vehemence. "I was educated in a lycée."

He received his bouquet without a moment's delay.

"And you are not worth so very much!"

It is true that to soften the severity of her retort, she went on,

"I must confess that you have become good for something, now that you take the boy out walking."

Father, who seemed always to be glad of anything which might bring him and grandfather together, heightened the reluctant admission into praise.

"Yes, François owes his health to you. And all these lovely walks that you are giving him will attach him the more firmly to the region in which he is to live, and which he will know the better because of them."

As a matter of fact I felt myself entirely aloof from the region and even from our house. What I loved was the earth, the vast unnamed earth, and not this place or that; most of all I loved the uncultivated places, the wild places in the woods, the copses, the secret nooks, and in less degree the pasture lands, any untilled, unsowed bit of earth. In the matter of people, I had accepted grandfather's new gospel which catalogued them as peasants and towns people. The nice people were in the country, whereas towns were inhabited by wicked individuals and notably by *bourgeois*, who persecute men of genius like my friends of the café. And in the towns were the schools where you were reduced to a state of slavery.

While I was giving myself up to these reflections my mother's gaze had fallen upon me; it seemed to me that she was reading my thoughts, and I blushed — a proof that I was not unaware of my inward insubordination.

"He has grown quite robust," she said. "Could he not begin gradually to take up his lessons? We could arrange him a place in the garden, where he would be in the out-door air, and yet not be entirely idle. Idleness is never good."

I was astounded to hear my mother uttering so direful a proposition — my mother, so careful to spare me all fatigue, so expert in nursing me, so minute in her watchfulness! Decidedly, they had changed parts; father had appeared suspicious of my walks with grandfather, and now he was not only authorising, he was encouraging them.

"No, no," he exclaimed, "pleurisy is too grave a matter. He would still risk losing strength and colour. See how well he looks now!" adding aside to mother, "Father is so happy in his little companion! Since he has had charge of him he has quite changed and grown younger. Haven't you noticed it?"

Mother, who always agreed with him, did not express her opinion. I divined that she was uneasy about me, but why? Had she not rejoiced in my good spirits and my round, rosy cheeks? Grandfather never attempted to monopolise me; he took me on his walks, and helped in that way, and in addition, he taught me a thousand things about trees, mushrooms, botany: the things he knew were much more interesting than the history, geography and catechism that my teachers used to teach me.

Now that my attention had been attracted to mother's uneasiness I continually noticed that she was always following me like a shadow. At the bottom of my heart I was pleased. Even a child loves to inspire fear in those who love him; it puts him at

a sort of vantage point, gives him a feeling as of being a man, and understanding life better than a weak woman can do.

One day mother was talking in her room with Aunt Deen. I heard only the reply of the latter, who never could conceal anything.

"Come, come! my poor Valentine; don't you go to troubling your head about that good-for-nothing boy. In the first place, I know perfectly what those two talk to one another about — country things, the pleasures of the fields, the peace of the earth, the goodness of the animals; all humbug, to be sure, but what of that? It's just like poultices,— it can't do any harm."

I had not the slightest doubt that they were talking of me, and I was not at all displeased at having my share in the family interest, for in these days there was a great deal of discussion about my brothers, who, having graduated from school, would start for Paris in the autumn, Bernard for the military school at Saint-Cyr, and Stephen, who was not yet sixteen, to complete his studies in mathematics, unless indeed he persisted in wishing to enter the Seminary. Aunt Deen was greatly distressed over the exorbitant cost of board and outfit, and was continually discanting with emotion upon the merits of our parents, who shrank from no financial sacrifice to complete our education.

"Aha!" sneered grandfather. "These great re-

ligious institutions don't take in a pupil for nothing. They bleed their patrons at all four veins for the love of God."

Furthermore, it was arranged that Louise was to go for two or three years to the convent school of the Ladies of the Retreat at Lyons. She would sober down there, and when she came home she would be an accomplished young lady, like Mélanie, who at that time was in the very flower of her youth — Mélanie, who long ago had invited me to sing vespers before a wardrobe, or to run after Yes-Yes, the drunkard, with a glass of water, and whose persistent piety foreshadowed a vocation which she had professed as a child, but concerning which she was now silent, unless, perhaps, to our mother.

Altogether the future of the family now demanded much reflection and many decisions. Grandfather and I remained quite apart from it all. Once beyond the gate we never looked back, except when my companion, laughing derisively, would say:

"And as to you, boy; what is being cooked up for you? Are you still inclined to enter the school of adversity?"

There had been much pleasantry over that incident, and I found it by no means amusing. I had given up all my fine plans, and had no thought of commanding some brilliant situation like my brothers. I was content with the sort of property which one enjoys without ever taking trouble, after grandfather's fashion,— the lake, the forest, the moun-

tain; not to speak of the stars and those fine July nights. I am not even sure that I did not prefer to them all the red benches of the Café of the Navigators, when I had the feeling of being a man, admitted to hear utterances concerning painting, music and politics.

Yet I never ceased to feel my mother's gaze resting upon me. By way of not acknowledging it I began to put on airs of independence. Like the "Scenes in Animal Life," I would work up offensive resemblances for all the people with whom we were familiar; turning men and things to ridicule and even affecting when with my brothers and sisters an incurious air, as if I had formed my views of life and had nothing more to learn. By a singular phenomenon, as I now see clearly, the more deeply I was initiated into the simplicity of rural life and the benevolence of nature the more complicated I became. And always, through all my newly assumed ways, that gaze followed me, as if it were seeking my heart.

Grandfather and I had a fright one day when we came upon my mother in the street. She was going to church for benediction and we to the café for our pleasure. She so rarely left the house that we had never thought of meeting her. Noses in air, already inhaling the special odour of tobacco and anise which awaited us, we paid no attention to the woman who was approaching, so modest, so grave that no one

thought of looking at her, and we were much surprised when she accosted us, asking,

"Where are you going?"

What would grandfather say? I wondered. We had so loudly proclaimed our disdain of the town which we were now lightheartedly crossing. Would he betray the secret which I had kept so well? Without the least embarrassment in the world he replied:

"To buy a paper, daughter."

Then he would not own up about our visits to the Café of the Navigators, either. Mother let us go on our way. When she had turned to the left, in the direction of the church, grandfather chuckled over the fine trick he had played her, but she had not wished to appear to doubt the truth of his reply: it had not deceived her. I knew it, for I had seen her blush at our falsehood.

Another circumstance directly revealed her penetration and her anxiety. One Sunday morning as I was going out of the door of the house with grandfather, she admonished us to come back in time for Mass. She would go with me herself, she said, although she had already heard mass at daybreak, as was her habit. All would have been well if grandfather and I, on our way home, had not met Gallus and Merinos, amiable and thirsty pair, who urged us, in spite of ourselves, to take a morning draught. We need only stay two or three minutes, at most, and we were really early. But at the Café was Martinod, perorating in full vein. All the tables were

listening to him, drinking to him, applauding him, surrounding him with an atmosphere of admiration, the smoke of the pipes rising like incense around him. He was describing with picturesque and highly coloured details the approaching era of Nature and Reason, so that every one seemed to be already living, by anticipation, in that glorious time. What festival it would be! — a generous humanity renouncing all divisions of caste, class or race, all frontiers and wars, fraternally sharing all riches of earth! The transfigured orator tore away the evil from the future, and showed the sun of that day like the golden monstrance in a religious procession. It was all so beautiful that we quite forgot about Mass, and when, sated with eloquence, we turned our steps homeward, the hour was long past.

At the gate, grandfather, descending from his exalted mood, began to show some anxiety. As for me, I felt not the slightest remorse, being under the shelter of an older responsibility. Still, when I saw, behind the half-closed blind, that shadow that was so easily disquieted about the absent one, I too felt my pride droop, and became conscious that I had done wrong. Mother came down to meet us. We found her on the doorstep, so pale that we could no longer mistake the importance of our defection. Her voice betrayed her anxiety as she asked:

"What can have happened?"

"Why, nothing at all," replied grandfather.

"Then why did you let the child miss Mass?"

"Oh, we forgot how time was passing."

This time grandfather rubbed his nose and excused himself as if he had done wrong. A shadow passed over mother's eyes. A moment before they had been limpid, and now the light that shone through their humidity pierced my heart. Softened as it was by the mist of tears it can not have been very formidable, there was nothing in it by itself so to affect me, but I have never forgotten its power. It must have been with eyes like these that Confessors of the faith looked upon their torturers. I know that I, too, have seen that divine flame.

Young as I was I understood that my mother was shaken by filial respect: yet a more imperious obligation constrained her to speak, and she spoke:

"We did not entrust this child to you, father, to withdraw him from his religious duties. You should not have forgotten this, for the sake both of his soul and of us."

She spoke with mingled firmness and gentleness, and her face, already pale when we arrived, became so white from the effort she was making, as to seem absolutely bloodless.

. . . Long, very long after this, when I was a young man, I was getting ready to go out to meet a woman. The woman whom I loved — for how long? — had promised to betray her husband for my pleasure, but I was thinking only of her beauty. My mother came into my room. She had not the courage to say a word; as so long ago she was trem-

bling, this time with that other sort of respect which is respect for oneself. I did not know why she had come, and I felt uneasy at being detained. She laid her hand on my shoulder:

"Francis," she said, "listen; one must never take what belongs to another."

I protested my innocent intentions, and as I went my way I shook off the importunate words, which however met me again on the road and went with me. By what clairvoyance of love had my mother divined where I was going? She had looked at me with those same eyes, faintly shadowed by mist. Grief, rather than years, had already made her almost an old woman. And I distinctly saw the evil of the light love to which I was hastening with a song upon my lips. . . .

Grandfather made no attempt to defend himself. He did not call to his aid the little dry laugh which usually served him so conveniently in shaking off his opponent without argument. He only murmured, somewhat weakly, "Oh! goodness, what a fuss about nothing," and hastened toward the staircase, to go up to his tower where, at least, he would be sheltered from reproach. But my father, who was coming down, seemed to close the way. A conflict appeared to be imminent. And by the natural inclination of my childish logic I suddenly recalled that return from the procession which had first revealed to me this same antagonism: — my parents all a-thrill from the ceremony which grandfather

compared to the festival of the sun, and my suddenly chilled enthusiasm. But I was in a mood to take this recollection lightly; without knowing it, I had changed sides.

Grandfather appeared to me all the more embarrassed on hearing steps upon the stairs. He could not avoid the meeting. But as a matter of fact it passed off the most quietly in the world. A few words were exchanged about the weather, the crops, our walk. Generosity, deference, the desire to avoid a domestic dispute, or to spare my father an anxiety, kept my mother silent as to our late return.

But after this she never saw me going out with grandfather without fixing upon me that look, the anxiety of which I still feel. By some ingenious artifice she used to add Louise to our party, or even little Nicola, who would trot behind us, her seven year old legs finding some difficulty in keeping up with us. The whole troop would set forth, grandfather clearly showing his displeasure over the new recruits.

"I don't propose to drag the whole camp after me," he would mutter. "I am not a child's nurse."

"Come, come!" Aunt Deen would reply, "such pretty children! You are only too proud to show yourself in their company."

None the less I agreed with him that the presence of my sisters spoiled our walks. One can never talk about anything with women along. They don't understand out-of-door things, and they get cross

as soon as one touches upon religion. I was not very far — I who had shown such fervour at my first communion — from thinking that mother exaggerated the importance of our having missed that service. I thought myself free, because I had closed my mind against all teaching except what came to me from grandfather. Being free, one could do as he pleased. We were not hindering the others from going to church, and even to the communion, and vespers into the bargain.

Vacation came and completely interrupted our walks by ourselves. After vacation school would begin, and I should resume my place among the little school boys of my own age, without so much as knowing that the previous three months had quite changed my heart.

BOOK III

I

POLITICS

After my long convalescence I did indeed return to school. It was an ancient institution in which kindly monks imparted antiquated instruction. It was possible to work there, when one's schoolfellows did not positively put obstacles in the way, but it was easier to devote oneself to clandestine industries, such as training flies and cockchafers, drawing caricatures, reading forbidden books, and even carrying on explorations through the passages. The discipline was no better than the teaching. Up to this time the idea had never occurred to me to view as a prison this great building with its numerous doors and windows where one came and went as one pleased under the paternal eye of a new porter, entirely absorbed in the care of his flowers and of a tortoise whose manners he was studying. But I was now new-born to the sentiment of liberty, and consequently to that of slavery. I made every effort therefore to discover that I was unhappy.

On holidays I resumed my walks with grandfather. An involuntary complicity established itself between us. If one or another of my brothers or sisters joined us we spoke only of indifferent things. When

we were alone we went into rhapsodies over the joys of the fields and the brotherhood of men, only hindered by property with all its enclosures. I learned that money was the cause of all ills, that one should despise and do away with it, and that the only necessary good things cost nothing, namely, health, the sunlight, pure air, the songs of birds and all the pleasures of the eye. My teachers, who were much more interested in Latin than in philanthropy, neglected to teach me the latter except by their example, to which I paid no attention. No more towns, no more armies (and Bernard, who was preparing at Saint-Cyr, and who had never been informed of these truths!), no more judges, no more lost lawsuits, no more houses. But here I thought that grandfather was going rather too far. No more houses! What about ours, then? Ours which had been repaired and all done over! It mattered little about the others, so long as ours was spared.

"Why no, little dunce; pastoral peoples used to sleep out of doors. It's more hygienic."

When Abraham journeyed to the land of Canaan he must have slept out of doors, and so must the shepherds whom we had met leading their flock to the mountains.

We made another pilgrimage to the pavilion which I had come to call Helen's pavilion, and from time to time we put in an appearance together at the Café of the Navigators, so that I did not entirely lose contact with my friends.

I was entering my fourteenth year, I think, or it may have been a little later, when our town became the scene of great events. The mayor's office was contested in an election, and the Marinetti Circus set up its tent and waggon-houses in the market-place. I do not know which of these two dissimilar facts seemed the more important to me.

At our house, in view of the new preoccupations as to our future, the tone of conversation became more serious. More than once I came upon our father and mother mysteriously discussing Mélanie's approaching majority.

"The time is coming," father would say. "I have promised and I shall keep my promise. But it will be hard."

And mother would answer,

"God wills it. He will give us the needful strength."

Nevertheless, she seemed less sad than father, when she spoke about my sister. What promise were they talking about, and what was it that God willed? I used often to think of the picture in the Bible representing the sacrifice of Isaac, but since the time of our missing church I was less inclined to believe that God was so very strict.

Mélanie went often to church, visited the poor, and dipped her brush in water every morning to smooth down her blond hair which curled naturally and refused to lie in straight bands. I knew these details through Aunt Deen, who was always saying:

"That child is an angel."

It had become impossible to quarrel with Mélanie. Our parents no longer gave her orders; they spoke to her gently, as if they were consulting her. Even I, without knowing why, dared not speak roughly to her, and growing less and less inclined to be respectful, I kept aloof from her, and no longer sought her company.

The others were not to return until the long vacation. Louise, from her boarding school in Lyons, wrote loving letters which I found somewhat silly, because they often alluded to religious ceremonies and visits of the Superior, or of some passing missionary. Bernard's letters briefly described the life at Saint-Cyr which he had just entered, and Stephen's contained numerous obscure allusions to his plans, which seemed to harmonise with those of Mélanie. I could not condescend so far as to play with the younger children, the delicate Nicola who was always disturbing mother while she was writing to the absent ones, and the tumultuous Jamie, in whose behalf I would cheerfully have seen the establishment of the severe discipline which I did not care about for myself. I treated them as from a higher level — they could not understand me. So that my real comrade was grandfather.

Two or three times my father, displeased by my silences or my superior airs, observed in those family councils of which somehow children generally manage to catch scraps,

"That child is growing secretive."

Mother, still somewhat uneasy about me, did not protest, but Aunt Deen, fertile in excuses, would authoritatively affirm that I would blossom out before long. Far from being grateful to this steadfast ally, I laughed in my sleeve at her fanatical loyalty, by way of proving my superior intelligence.

The circus and the elections stirred up the town at the same time. Every day as I crossed the market-place I would stop to watch the slow erection of the tent and the placing of the raised seats, necessary preliminaries of the show. At our house the conversation was more likely to turn upon the future of the country. I was not so ignorant of politics as they might have supposed, though my opinions vacillated. I knew that certain days, like the Fourth of September and the Sixteenth of May, were anniversaries variously celebrated, that all the monks except ours had been expelled, and that there was an expedition to China,— which as it happened, aroused only criticism at our house.

"Why can't they let those folks alone!" grandfather would exclaim.

Father would shake his head:

"They are forgetting the past. A conquered people should never scatter its forces."

I was not ignorant of his having taken part in the war — we used to speak of it simply as "the war"— and I could easily imagine him at the head of an army, whereas grandfather must always have

preferred his violin and his telescope to swords, guns, pistols and other murderous engines. In vain had the Café des Navigateurs poured contempt upon all military glory: it still kept its prestige for me. Yet I could not easily understand how the French Guard and the grenadier in the drawing-room could have died, one for the King and the other for the Emperor, and yet both deserve the same praise, while the partisans of the Emperor were always exchanging opprobrious remarks with those of the King.

Father explained: "For the soldier, there is only France. There is no nobler death."

Grandfather, being present, declared that in his opinion the noblest thing was to die for liberty. But he did not insist, and notwithstanding the silence which followed I saw that he had displeased my father.

The idea seemed to haunt him, for he returned to it on our next walk, and described, with more enthusiasm than usual, a splendid epoch which he had known, compared with which our own period was but darkness. Our own period seemed to me quite endurable, between our walks and the Café. It appeared that at that time, as under the Revolution, liberty had a second time been set free, and when liberty is set free an era of universal peace and concord begins. Citizens moved by a fraternal impulse were working together in vast national workshops, a modest remuneration, the same for all, weak and strong, robust and malingerers, giving to each that

contentment which arises from being sure of one's daily bread.

"That is what M. Martinod demands," I said.

"Martinod is right," replied my companion, "but will he succeed where we came to grief?"

"You came to grief, grandfather!"

"We failed in the blood of the days of June."

We failed in the blood of the days of June. The meaning of the words might escape me, but they made music in my ears like the rolling of a drum. Long ago — three or four years perhaps — I had been excited over other mysterious words, such as the lament of the White Blackbird, *I was arranging trifles while you were in the woods,* and also that of the Nightingale, *All night long I strain my throat for her, but she sleeps and hears me not.* Now I found their melancholy somewhat insipid, and preferred this new rhythm, so warlike and full of pain. Touched to the heart I at once asked, as with Aunt Deen's stories when I was little,

"And what happened after that?"

"A tyrant came."

Ah, this time it was all clear! A tyrant, a hospodar, to be sure! Aunt Deen's hospodar, the famous man all dressed in red, who gave commands with loud shouts.

"What tyrant?" I asked, by way of knowing it all.

"Badinguet. Napoleon III. For that matter all emperors and all kings are tyrants."

No; certainly I could not understand. The glimmer of truth which I had half seen died out. Our father, at table or in other conversations with us, had never failed to instil into our minds respect and love for the long line of kings who had ruled France, and whom nearly all the bad paintings in the drawing-room, save the grenadier and the latest portraits, had served. He used to talk as often of the power of nations as grandfather of their happiness. Napoleon the Great, whose epic story all school boys know by heart, had ruined the country, but all the same he was the greatest genius of modern times. As for Napoleon the Little, it was to him we owed defeat and the loss of territory. Curiously enough these events, when they were spoken of at our house, never seemed to me to have the slightest connection with those that figured in my history book. One never recognises in the plants of a herbarium those that are growing in the fields. And when father spoke in praise of the kings grandfather had never made any objection. He had neither approved nor disapproved. And here he was declaring in peremptory tones that all kings were tyrants! Why did he keep silence at table when he was so sure of his opinion? No doubt he did not wish to oppose any one. Thenceforth I accounted to myself for his self-effacement by delicacy, and was moved to consider him right.

Once again he spoke to me of those mysterious days of June when people fought to break the chains

that bound the proletariat. I had no distinct notion of what the proletariat was. Tem Bossette, Mimi Pachoux and The Hanged, for instance, were they proletaires? I pictured them to myself loaded with chains and shut up in a cellar full of empty wine casks — because if the casks had been full they would never have come out of their own accord. Grandfather had rushed to their aid. I learned from his own lips that he had taken part in the insurrection in Paris, and had carried a gun.

"Did you fire it off, grandfather?" I asked in surprise and perhaps in admiration, for I should never have thought him capable of so vigorous an act.

He modestly explained that he had never had an opportunity.

Aunt Deen had shown me, in a cupboard, the sabre which my father had worn during the war. Why had no one ever showed me that gun? Was not it too a family trophy? Grandfather concluded his somewhat vague story with the familiar reflection:

"Papa wasn't pleased."

He seemed so old that I should never have had an idea of thinking of his parents, who were nothing but paintings in the drawing-room. And here he was saying *papa*, like little Jamie, not even *father* like my elder brothers and me. Greatly amused I exclaimed,

"Your papa, grandfather?"

"To be sure, the man of roses and laws, the magistrate, the nurseryman."

He spoke of him without the slightest respect, and this to me unimaginable audacity seemed a thing so prodigious that by itself it was enough to obliterate all distinctions of rank. By it he at once placed himself above all other men, of whom he could make light with impunity. I promised myself to be disrespectful, too, to show my spirit.

Grandfather proceeded to enlighten me with certain particulars concerning the displeasure of his "papa."

"Yes, indeed! he insisted that a king is as necessary to a nation as a gardener to a garden. And all the bad paintings in the drawing-room thought the same."

What! all the family! Grandfather was deliberately taking his stand apart from all the ancestors! He proposed to flock by himself, to walk alone, far from the road, as in our walks. What's the use of being a grown-up person if one must still consider others, may not do as he chooses, must heed counsels and remonstrances? He had done mighty well to carry a gun, seeing it was for liberty.

His impertinent little laugh seemed to break with paternal opinion and invoke nature:

"It's absurd! As if it was necessary to trim trees and cut plants into shape! See how they grow without any help, and if these don't knock out all the gardens in the world!"

We had reached a grove of beeches, aspens and other trees. The tender little spring leaves were not large enough yet to hide the ramifications of the branches. Before my convalescence I should have disagreed with grandfather. The transformation of our garden since our father took the reins of government, the arrangement of the grass-plots, the form of the groves, the harmonious order of the whole, had given me great satisfaction. But our wanderings in the country had by degrees opened my eyes to the beauty of wilder things. A clump of ferns and reeds, a tangle of vines and bushes, rocks crowned with ruddy bracken, and hidden nooks had won my preference, so that I unhesitatingly accepted his view. But I was in a measure stunned by the discovery that one might be of a different mind from one's parents and even sit in judgment upon them, like this, in all quietness of mind. Grandfather had not been afraid to condemn his father in my presence. It was the most effective lesson in independence that I had yet received, and this discovery, far from gratifying me, inspired me with fear, and aroused again the feeling of sacrilege which I had felt with respect to the dead man. Irreverence was not liberty. One might scorn and at the same time obey, still, one really had a right to be free, not to accept his father's ideas, not obey his orders.

I dared not give form to the thoughts which were assailing me and therefore returned to politics.

"Then," I asked, "there won't be kings any more?"

"As fast as people become civilised, kings will disappear."

"How about the Count de Chambord?"

"Oh, as for him, he may as well cut up his white flag into a nightshirt."

To speak of the Count de Chambord like that! The pleasantry shocked, rather than amused me. The Count de Chambord had always seemed to me a legendary personage, as far away and illusory as the chevaliers in the ballads which had thrilled me during my convalescence. To be sure he had not filched the cup of happiness from Titania, the fair queen of the elves, he had not come on a red roan steed to see the young girl of the romance of the Swan's Nest; but I knew that he was living in exile, endued with the martyr's aureola, and that he was expected. Aunt Deen never spoke of him except as "our prince," and raised her head proudly whenever he was mentioned, as if he belonged to her. From time to time conferences were held in our drawing-room for the discussion of his approaching return. And he would not come back alone; God would come with him, and he would bring back the white flag. My imagination found no difficulty in picturing him at the head of a multitude waving banners, though I could not quite determine whether it was an army or a religious procession.

Of all these conferences one of the members was

Mlle Tapinois, she who resembled the old dove in my picture book; there were also M. de Hurtin, an old gentleman who looked like the falcon who had been ruined by Revolutions, and divers other personages also drawn from my "Scenes from Animal Life," and who are now somewhat mixed in my memory. There was also a certain impetuous priest, Abbé Heurtevant, who was always scenting the battle from afar, and whose prominent round eyes could see only things at a distance, so that he was always bumping into the furniture, and always restless, carrying on war against vases and Chinese curiosities. When he upset a knickknack he never excused himself but simply remarked:

"That's one less."

Small frivolous objects of that sort interfered with his actions and he detested them. Aunt Deen forgave even his destructiveness for the sake of his eloquence. When he was standing his head was perched so high that I would look for it as for a mountain top. On the other hand, when he sat down he would almost disappear in an easy chair, his knees on a level with his chin, as if he had been folded in three parts of equal length. He was as emaciated as an ascetic, which was not surprising since his only food was roots. It was he, indeed, who during the mushroom season, lived upon Satan bolets. They did him no harm, but neither did they fatten him. Grandfather was greatly interested in his diet, considering him a phenomenon, and uphold-

ing his opinions because of his eccentricities. He never called him anything but Nostradamus. On the contrary, father thought comparatively little of such an ally, and indeed did not greatly care for these quasi secret meetings.

"Our good abbé," he would say, "is always up in the air. He studies the heavens, but knows nothing of what is going on down here."

What need had he of knowing, since he could foresee the future? In fact, he was making a collection of predictions concerning the restoration of the monarchy, and could cite from memory all the important ones. I can remember a good many of them, having heard them so often. The most celebrated of them all was that from the Abbey of Orval, which had predicted the downfall of Napoleon, the return of the Bourbons and even the reign of Louis-Philippe and the war. How then, could it have been mistaken in the apostrophe which Abbé Heurtevant would whisper in a moving tone, bringing tears from the eyes of the ladies. *Come, young prince, leave the island of captivity . . . unite the lion with the white flower.* He had found a subtle interpretation of the island of captivity and the lion, which on the first investigation had been obscure. I was however in no haste to have the young prince obey this injunction, because of the events which were bound to follow, namely, the conversion of England and of the Jews, and to finish up with, Antichrist. Anti-

christ terrified me: he also, like Death in my Bible, was to ride on a pale horse.

"The young prince, indeed," grandfather would sneer when I related all these marvels to him, for he refused to be present at the assemblies over which Abbé Nostradamus presided, "young prince of sixty springs!"

There were also the visions of a certain Rose-Colombe, a Dominican nun, deceased upon the Italian coast. A great revolution was to burst out in Europe, the Russians and Prussians would turn their churches into stables, and peace would not appear again until the lilies, descendants of Saint Louis, were again blossoming upon the throne of France, which would happen. *Which would happen* closed the paragraph, proving that it was not a mere hypothesis, as learned men might construe it, but an incontestable truth, proved by ecstatic visions.

"Yes, the lilies will bloom again," Aunt Deen loved to repeat, for she attached especial credit to the sayings of Sister Rose Colombe.

This conviction caused her to rush up and downstairs all the more proudly, since she might suppose that her services would be needed. She had a habit of accompanying the innumerable labours to which, without respite, she gave herself, with interjections and exclamations. We could hear her psalmodies as she swept or scoured, for she turned her hand to everything.

"They will bloom again, to the salvation of religion and of France."

The Abbé did not stop at predictions which reestablished monarchs among ourselves. His solicitude extended even over unhappy Poland, and one evening he triumphantly brought in a Roman newspaper, in which was recorded the apparition of the Blessed Andrew Bobola, who informed a monk of the restoration of that kingdom, after a war which would involve all nations.

"At last Poland is saved," he concluded in a tone of satisfaction.

"Poor Poland, it is high time!" chimed in Aunt Deen, who had compassion upon all unfortunates.

Nevertheless, in order to attain to these miraculous renascences many catastrophes must be endured. Our abbé heroically put the torch to all Europe, and consented to drench it in blood if only the lilies would bloom again at the end.

The ladies enjoyed his vaticinations. His nostrils would expand like sails under a favourable breeze, and his round eyes would bulge with so much ardour that it almost seemed as if they might fall out, all in a flame. He used also to break a lance with the party that admitted the escape of Louis XVII from the prison of the Temple and the authenticity of Naundorff. Mlle Tapinois, especially, preached Naundorffism, which won her many a stinging retort. She almost drew Aunt Deen after her, but one glance from Abbé Heurtevant

sufficed to keep her firm in the good cause. Mlle Tapinois invoked Providence, of whom every one knew that she was the right arm, declaring him — it was impossible to say why — hostile to the return of the Count de Chambord. By way of eclipsing her adversary she would state that Jules Favre, the advocate of her Naundorff, had received from him as a token of gratitude the seal of the Bourbons, and happening to have no other one with him on that historic day, he had set the royal seal to the Treaty of Paris after the signature of Count Bismarck, as if he were acting simply as the delegate of his prince. This anecdote having obtained the success of curiosity, in spite of father's remark, "No Bourbon would have signed such a treaty," Abbé Heurtevant, broken-hearted at having been interrupted in his predictions by such fiddle-faddles, shrugged his shoulders in token of his incredulity, and from the corner where I was playing with a pack of cards, I heard him murmur,

"When Balaam's ass spoke, the prophet kept silence."

I knew the adventure of Balaam from a picture in my Bible. But our abbé came in also for his own, and was recompensed for his brief overthrow. Old M. Hurtin, whose bird of prey profile deceived people as to the obstinacy of his temper, shaken by the stories and asseverations of Mlle Tapinois, began on his part to bring up objections to Monseigneur, for no one failed to give him his title if only

to dispute it. He went so far as to reproach him for having no children.

"One will be made for him," M. Heurtevant declared in a moment of sudden illumination.

This remark, most forcibly uttered, raised a great outcry. The ladies manifested their indignation by various little ejaculations, and Mlle Tapinois, covering her face, protested against a man of God daring to scandalise a respectable and well-meaning company, and with children present. The abbé, blushing and quite out of countenance, being much more accustomed to reprimand others than to be reprimanded, lifted up his hands while Mlle Tapinois was haranguing, as a sign that he desired to explain. The opportunity was not immediately given, and he was forced to have patience until the excitement was calmed. He had simply meant to say that the continuity of the dynasty would be provided for, and that the royal race was not threatened with extinction. A legitimate successor would do as well as a child of a king. His explanations were received with ill grace, and Mlle Tapinois, who was seated near me, turned to M. de Hurtin, and put him through a course of questions, to certify that the prophet had found a very bad mouthpiece; thus taking her revenge on Balaam's ass, which had not escaped her acute ear.

This incident which fastened itself on my memory though I did not very well understand it, as sometimes happens with memories, had cast a damper

on these royalist meetings, when the approaching elections reanimated them.

"I do not believe in salvation by election," father remarked, "still we must neglect nothing for the welfare of the country."

A rumour was going round that the mayor's chair would be contested, the actual occupant being unworthy. But who would lead the conflict? It must be a man of mettle, able and firm. Thenceforth I never passed the municipal building on my way to school without imagining it endowed with machicolations and cannons and bearing its part in a great confusion of historic sieges.

The bell at our gate was incessantly ringing, and it was not always some one for the doctor. Well dressed gentlemen who seemed to prefer to slip in at nightfall with the shadows, peasants, working men, were invading the house, and the same words were constantly repeated:

"Won't you come forward, doctor?"

"Doctor, you must come forward."

The old men of the suburbs would say more familiarly, "Get a move on, Monsieur Michel."

I observed that the peasants and working men put more earnestness and conviction into their entreaties. The well-dressed gentlemen, better mannered, and more discreet, did not insist, and one of them, stout and dignified, carried his devotion so far as to propose himself.

"To be sure, we understand your scruples, your

hesitations. It's a weighty undertaking and very expensive. If it must be, I will consent to be candidate in your place — just to please you."

"Not you," spoke up with authority a bearded individual in a blue blouse. "You wouldn't get four votes. Monsieur Michel is another story."

The gentleman, thus turned down, majestically buttoned up his frock coat.

When the intruders had retired, a discussion arose between father and mother, peaceful, grave and confidential. So absorbed were they that they did not notice that we were present.

"You can not," said mother gently, almost quoting the stout gentleman. "Think of the expenses that we are bearing. You were obliged to buy the property in order to spare your father, and I encouraged your doing so, remember. In a family, all stand or fall together. The great schools are very expensive, for we do not get scholarships, though we have seven children. You are known to be hostile to the institutions under which we are governed. Within a few years we shall need to settle Louise, even though Mélanie will need but a small dowry. And besides, think of yourself. You are already working too hard, your patients absorb all your strength. I am afraid you will overdo. We are no longer in our first youth, my dear. The family is enough for us. The family is our first duty."

Father was silent for a moment, as if weighing the pros and cons. Then he said:

"I do not forget the family. Don't distress yourself about my health, Valentine. I have never felt myself more robust nor better able to endure fatigue. And I can not help thinking of the useful part which is offered me,— for to be mayor to-day is to be deputy to-morrow: to denounce to the country the gang that is cheating it and fattening upon it, to prepare the public mind for the return of the king — so necessary if we are to recover from defeat. All these plain folk who rely upon me touch my heart, and shake my resolution to hold myself aloof from public life. I have no personal ambition. But even here, surely here, there is a duty to fulfil."

They were like alternating strophes in which the family and the country by turns made their pressing appeals.

My father's picture of a restored France did not closely resemble that of Abbé Heurtevant, who trusted to miracles. He added circumstantial details which I could not follow, but in the end, without knowing exactly how, we got the impression that the aroused provinces would march promptly and joyfully under the authority of the prince who would address himself directly to them, and who at the same time would refer all religious matters to the Pope of Rome.

Father was so well able to command that I found it quite natural that the government should be entrusted to him, since the realm of the house was not

enough for him, and he desired another. And besides, in that case he would be too busy to watch over my studies and my thoughts, which I well knew he talked over anxiously with mother, in the evenings.

Things were even more changed at the Café des Navigateurs than at our house, where only a faint note of coming events reached my ear. I went thither with grandfather, one holiday, when we were not expected. Casenave, prematurely aged, apart from the others, was still drinking for pleasure, in the midst of the general inattention, the other members of the group being occupied with loftier things. They were not talking of the king, but of liberty. I learned that the hydra of reaction which had been supposed to be crushed after the Sixteenth of May, was beginning to lift up its head. Galurin was openly demanding the partition of goods, which was his hobby, Gallus and Merinos were repudiating a *bourgeois* Republic, desiring it to be at once Athenian and popular, one which would assure to each person a minimum wage for an indeterminate amount of work, and at the same time would be open to beauty, and a protector of the arts. They were both sketching, in the intervals of their labours, one a symphony, the other a charcoal drawing in which the new era was symbolised. But I hardly recognised Martinod. Instead of presenting to our dazzled eyes, as in former days, the marriage of the People and Reason, he left all phrase-making to the

two artists. With unexpected coherence he was enumerating urgent reforms, the diminution of military service with a view to its complete suppression, the independence of syndicates, State monopoly of education, not to mention the revision of the Constitution, a matter upon which every one was agreed. The independence of syndicates especially struck me because no matter how much my neighbour explained to me in what it consisted, I could not in the least understand it, and therefore set a particularly high value upon it. Leaving his reforms, notwithstanding their urgency, Martinod, who was continually bringing in recruits and treating them, worked himself up into a great excitement upon a subject of more immediate importance, which was the next mayor.

Decidedly, I understood one thing, the battle would be carried on there and not elsewhere.

Soon the entire conversation began to turn upon proper names. Forgotten was the Athenian and popular Republic, forgotten were reforms, only individuals were spoken of, and very few of these found grace in the eyes of the company. Most of them were considered suspicious; they were not deemed pure enough,— and all sorts of fatal defects were brought up against them, notably consorting with priests, and sending their children to clerical schools. Then there were discussions in an undertone (and I clearly saw Martinod directing furtive glances, now in grandfather's direction and now in mine, which flattered

me, for in general I did not exist for so great a man), of a redoubtable leader who would be the worst adversary and not easily to be overcome.

"There is only he," Martinod concluded. "The others are all knaves or thieves."

"He is the only one," repeated the chorus in approval.

Yet nobody mentioned his name. I found no difficulty, however, in picturing him to myself formidable and mysterious, leading his forces to certain victory. Grandfather was negligently listening to Casenave's dialogue with his double. Martinod, who had been observing him for a moment or two, now secretly and again full in the face, suddenly leaned toward him, and said abruptly:

"Do you know one thing, Father Rambert? You are the one to lead us in this fight."

"I!" exclaimed grandfather, quite taken aback. "Oho!"

And he gurgled out his little laugh. They let him laugh at his ease, after which Martinod repeated his offer.

"To be sure, you. Who deserves it better? In '48 you came near dying for liberty."

"Not at all. I did not come near dying."

This proposition was not further pressed. But as we were going back to the house at the dinner hour he stood still, saying:

"That was a good thing, Martinod! I their candidate? Insane!"

He laughed again with all his heart. A little further on he repeated,

"I, their candidate!"

This time he did not laugh. I understood that all the same he was not displeased with Martinod's suggestion.

II

THE CIRCUS

My attention was distracted from these election concerns by the circus which had been set up in the Market Place. Its immense white tent, at last secured in place by solid pegs, bore above the entrance curtain, in letters of gold against a blue background, the inscription *Marinetti's Circus*. A drummer plied his drumsticks at short intervals to attract the attention of the public, and from time to time the portière was raised and a princess in a spangled robe and rose-coloured stockings emerged like an apparition. I used to pass that way on my return from school, merely to hear that unceasing drum and to see that lady, who was sometimes old and sometimes very young. How I longed to get inside the tent! I indulged my desire for this forbidden paradise by lingering as long as possible and then speeding away at my best pace, so as not to be late at home.

Once I made the circuit of the tent and got "behind the scenes." The waggon-houses were drawn up side by side at the back. Thick smoke was pouring from their slender chimneys — as if from green wood, and from the odour some witch's broth must have been in course of preparation. Several raw-

boned horses were wandering at liberty, as if they had not the strength to go far, under the indulgent watch of dogs whose indolence reassured me. A parroquet was fluttering from roof to roof. On the steps of one waggon a woman was sitting clothed in rags which unblushingly revealed her amber skin, combing her hair in the sun; the black mass which she drew forward cast a shadow over all her face, hiding it from me, though it alone interested me. A bronzed old fellow was smoking his pipe with a majesty like that of the old shepherd in his russet mantle, walking before his sheep with even pace toward the mountain. Some half-naked children, brown and curly-headed, crawling among the waggons, were hustling one another, exchanging thumps, when suddenly a door opened and out bounced a termagant, holding a stewpan in her left hand and with her right restoring peace by means of a few sound slaps.

This spectacle in no way cooled my curiosity. Has the wrong side of a theatre ever cooled the interest of amateurs or the zeal of actors? What was not my delight then when grandfather, returning from a walk, proposed to take me inside. I imagine he was going in on his own account and was far from suspecting my longings.

We entered. The orchestra, composed of a cornopeon, two small flutes and a clavier which some one struck with two rulers — I was unfamiliar with the dulcimer — were making such a clatter as quite to drown out the faithful and monotonous drum out-

side. Little by little we grew used to it and through all the noise I soon became aware of a sort of call, at once indescribably sad, sweet and authoritative, and so insistent that no one could resist it. In later years the Hungarian dances gave me a better understanding of the longing which I then felt. The sound brought before me unknown, far distant lands, and all the pleasures of vague pain. I longed to extend my arms to hasten the future. It was, as it were, a new apprehension of the still more vague sensation which Aunt Deen's cradle song had awakened in me:

Si Dieu favorise
Ma noble entreprise
J'irai-z-à Venise
Couler d'heureux jours.

And I dimly realised that The House would never fulfil my dream. We didn't hear such music there.

Powdered clowns in parti-coloured red and yellow costumes and little pointed caps played tricks upon one another which excited the laughter of the crowd and disgusted me. I had not come to witness buffoonery, but had expected, without quite knowing what, a noble and moving spectacle. Happily a tight-rope dancer restored my serenity, for it was with difficulty that she preserved her equilibrium, seeming likely at any moment to fall to the ground.

But the sensational number was the flying trapeze of the two Marinetti brothers. More than one celebrated acrobat has doubtless begun his career in a

travelling circus. The two Marinetti brothers later became celebrated; one was killed in London by a fall; the other is to-day one of the first mimics of the world. At that time they were very young fellows, hardly older than I. One might have thought that they were simply amusing themselves, with no thought of the spectators. They played into each other's hands with touching solicitude and arranged by a slight signal for the execution of their joint turns — I had almost said their duet, for there was so much rhythm in the supple movements of their two bodies that they really seemed to sing. During their whole glorious or tragic career, did they ever do anything more daring than those flights from one trapeze to another, without the security of the net, always laid in wait for by death, for which they seemed to care no more than a sparrowhawk for a knife?

The stifled cry of a woman in the audience awoke me to the danger to which I had been as indifferent as they, but of which I became suddenly aware. I was full of admiration and envy of them, soaring thus through the air. I could conceive of nothing more heroic, and my notion of courage underwent a change. Until now, through the epic stories father had told me, I had imagined it as always serving a cause. Hector was defending his city against the Greeks and Roland his faith against the Saracens. But was it not finer to juggle thus with oneself, for no reason, for one's own pleasure? — for the public

had ceased to count. In that ill-lighted circus, to the sound of that strange, exciting orchestra, I came to feel the charm of the danger that serves no purpose.

But clowns, rope dancer and even the Marinetti brothers were eclipsed in my imagination as by enchantment, when into the ring there dashed a little horsewoman standing erect upon a black horse whose saddle was large and flat like a table. I had been looking down during the interval, that is why I noticed the horse, for otherwise I should surely have seen only the rider. She wore a robe of gold. If the lamps had emitted less smoke and more light it is probable that that frayed dress would not have given me such a vision of luxury. The girl's arms were bare and her hair unbound. Alone among all those tawny performers she was fair like the heroines of all my ballads. Merely by her leap into the ring she gave me what no woman had ever given me before, not even she whom I had met with grandfather and whom I had called the lady of the pavilion before I named her Helen; — not the sense of beauty — to that I had already attained; but the fear of approaching her and not keeping her. Yet I search my memory in vain for her features — I can not find them. I must have seen her often, and now I wonder if I ever looked at her, if I ever really dared to look at her. I think she had golden eyes — the golden tint of a virgin in a stained glass win-

dow through which the sun is shining. How old was she? Sixteen or seventeen — not older, and perhaps not so old. The fruits of her country do not need many months for ripening. She appeared taller than she was, by reason of her slenderness. It would be unjust to call her thin; slight, yes, but her slight form was full and muscular, and I wondered at the nascent roundness of her bosom. She was leaping through hoops that were held before her, and at each spring I trembled lest the horse should get away or she should miss the large saddle. It made me happy to tremble for her. Reassured by her skill I began to watch the movement of her hair, which each time she bounded rose and fell in cadence upon her shoulders. If a lock fell over her face she would throw it back with a gesture of annoyance.

The gravity of her countenance showed that she was wholly absorbed in her work. From time to time her lips would part with the little words *hop, hop,* designed to warm up her horse, who was apathetically rounding the circle. Then she would seat herself on the saddle for a moment's rest, her legs hanging, while she indifferently bowed her head in answer to the applause, her bosom, unconfined by her clinging gown, rising and falling with her quickened breath. She seemed completely isolated from all around by her gravity, her indifference. The young girls whom I knew, my sisters' friends, used

to talk, chatter, laugh, play, put their arms around each others' waists. This one was passive as an idol.

The show ended with a pantomime, every scene of which I remember. When we went back to the house I repeated it as well as I could by mobilising my sister Nicola, and even little Jamie for a minor part, pressing two little schoolfellows into the service, and with this improvised troop I proposed to treat our parents on the festival of one or the other. Our performance was ruthlessly stopped in the very middle without the slightest respect for dramatic art. Grandfather alone was clamorously delighted with it, for which Aunt Deen reproved him. Reflecting upon the incident, I at last recognised that the plot turned upon a hoodwinked husband. The innocent Nicola had been charged with this part, and under my instructions performed it with wonderful success. But I was forbidden to return to the circus.

The little circus queen who had made a single spring from her horse's back into my imagination was doubtless destined to remain a magnificent and remote memory for me. But grandfather loved the company of artists and unconventional folk. I can see him now at the Café des Navigateurs, taking sides with all the Martinod group against the bourgeois. One day as we were crossing the Market Place he went round the tent to where the waggons were drawn up.

"Where are we going, grandfather?" I murmured, with throbbing heart.

"I want to get a nearer view of these people."

In fact, he stopped and talked with the men who were smoking their pipes, while the women were preparing the soup or mending clothes. He spoke to them in an unknown tongue, which must have been Italian. This language upon his lips seemed to me simply incomprehensible. He pronounced it almost like the words that we use, only dwelling upon certain syllables and gliding over those that followed. But when those bronzed men spoke their words took on a strange accent, sometimes low and sometimes sharp, like gay music.

Were these clowns or acrobats? The Marinetti brothers were absent. To see them there would have filled me with pride. The only important personage whom I seemed to recognise was the rope dancer, and she was somewhat disconcertingly crowned with grey hair, and was sadly repairing a dirty skirt of puffed gauze. I was not aware that its proper name is *tulle*.

Timidly my eyes sought the little horsewoman, though I should have preferred not to find her. I had looked too far away; she was at my side, peeling potatoes with a broken knife. Instead of her golden tunic, she was in an ugly striped gown. Her bare feet — that had been shod with gold — were covered with dust. But in this humiliation she seemed to

me as beautiful as in her glory, on the pedestal of her large saddle, springing through hoops amid multitudinous applause. My eyes still enlightened by illusion, I found her just as beautiful, and yet my first impulse was to move away, of course from timidity — but also, I confess, because I had got from Aunt Deen, in the matter of gipsies and beggars, her fear of vermin, which she always said, are easily caught.

Let him who can explain these inconsistencies. I found a new and obscure feeling awaking within me, merely from the shame I felt at that recoil, and in my eagerness to be able to forgive myself, I could at once have shared with her even her insects.

I admired the nobility and also the dexterity with which she peeled her potatoes, never making two beginnings, but removing an entire skin with a single operation. She was condescending without impatience to this mean occupation, and I was grateful to her for her humility. As the other day in the ring, during her hippic exercises, she was serious and impassive, absorbed in her work. Yet did she not observe my fixed observation? She deigned to be the first to speak.

"Peeling is slow work," she observed.

"Yes, indeed," I replied, at the very summit of happiness; "peeling is slow work."

I should have liked to help her. I ought to have helped her, but I dared not. A pharisaic scruple withheld me. Though my zeal might carry me even

to the vermin which you catch without knowing it, I had not the courage to endure the obloquy of peeling potatoes in the public square, before all those *roulottes*.

Our mutual confidences went no further. Suddenly a guttural voice called,

"Nazzarena!"

She left her vegetables and went away without saying good-bye. I was greatly moved; at least I knew her name. I rushed back to the house at a gallop, leaving behind me grandfather, waving his arms and crying,

"Halloa! Wait!"

It was impossible for me not to run. Wings had sprouted from my shoulders, and during my wild race my whole being was surging, like our music box when the spring was released. I rushed into the garden, bumping against Tem Bossette, who had not stepped aside quickly enough, and who shouted,

"What's the matter with you, Master Francis?"

I replied laughing, but without checking my speed:

"Why, nothing at all. Nothing is the matter with me."

I leaped over the cannas, flew to the orchard like a run-away chicken, and threw myself, breathless, against a young apple tree. The trees were in blossom — it was springtime. The branches trembled at the shock, and a shower of rosy petals rained down upon me.

I was far from suspecting that I was also gathering the blossom of love, the love that does not ripen.

At school the Marinetti circus had become the object of all our interest and conversation. In the playground, between two games of prison-bars, the big boys discussed sometimes the flying trapeze, which had dazzled the lovers of sport, and sometimes the little horsewoman, preferred by the clan of philosophers. I would catch fragments of their remarks as I passed, and I was burning to arouse the envy of my elders with the superiority which I had achieved over them. Thus torn between my secret and my vanity, it was the latter which won out, and one day, with feigned modesty, I admitted that I had spoken to *her*. My object was at once attained and even exceeded: they all crowded around me, congratulating me, plying me with questions. I was forced to embroider the truth a little, in order to satisfy their curiosity.

"You are a lucky fellow," said Fernand de Montraut, whose jealousy I divined.

Fernand de Montraut was the ornament of the rhetoric division and at the same time the lowest in the class. He passed for the most elegant fellow in school because of his cravats, and every one bowed to his superior experience in all matters of sentiment, for he boasted the friendship of several girls. Unfortunately, he added,

"Then you are in love?"

Not knowing until that moment what it was to be in love, I at once learned its meaning from his question, and gave myself up to the melancholy which I deemed the proper thing.

Grandfather having struck up an acquaintance with the circus folk, whom he supplied with tobacco, I found myself again in Nazzarena's presence. The desire to give her something tortured me, the more so because Fernand de Montraut, an acknowledged judge, had assured me that one always gave presents to ladies. The only embarrassment was the choice of gift. Now I had in a drawer a collection of cornelian marbles which I treasured as if they had been jewels. There were spotted red ones, and black ones with white circles. Nothing that I possessed was more precious to me. For a moment I hesitated at so great a sacrifice, and thought of at least keeping back that flame-coloured agate that the light shone through and which was my favourite. But it was clear to me that if I kept back that one my offering would be worthless. In a moment of resignation rather than of enthusiasm I gathered up the whole lot and ran to my new friend, awkwardly presenting them to her without a word of explanation. She seemed somewhat surprised, but accepted them without hesitation.

"Zat's pretty," she said, "you 'z cute."

She used familiar words, which I had always heard without noticing their sound, and it seemed as if she had transformed them into another language, all

flowers and music. I was emboldened to speak to her in reply, urged on perhaps by a notion of justice: having sacrificed my marbles I had a right to some compensation.

"I know your name," I said with some emphasis. "Your name is Nazzarena."

She was greatly delighted at the extent of my knowledge.

"Aha! he knows my name. But it isn't Nazzarena, it's Nazzaré-na. Say it!"

I must needs learn her accent. After which she asked,

"What's your name?"

"Francis."

"Like the saint of Assisi. And where are you from?"

"Why, from here, of course."

How should I be from anywhere else? One lives in his own town and his own house. Perhaps she perceived her blunder, for she asked no more questions and it was I who bashfully resumed the conversation, not without timidity.

"Where are you from?"

"I don't know."

What a curious answer! One always knows where one is from. Well!

"Then you have no house of your own?"

"That's our house."

She pointed to one of the waggons, the front of which was painted green. I could not mistake her

expression of scorn. She suddenly turned away and gazed at the great buildings of cut stone which surrounded the market place on all four sides; my town is ancient and rugged, and its houses were built to last for centuries. Perhaps she was estimating the security of a stationary life, but I was picturing to myself the joys of a nomad existence when I went on:

"It must be very amusing."

"What must?"

"To keep changing your locality."

I used the word *locality* purposely, to give her a high idea of me.

"That depends," she said. "There are places where the receipts are bad. One time we made only seven francs and a half."

Details of that sort were of no interest, but I went on to confess to an unbounded admiration for this mode of life. At this declaration she opened her eyes wide, doubtless amazed that one could envy her when one lived in one of those great buildings, capable of enduring all sorts of bad weather.

"All the same you wouldn't come with us." The mere suggestion seemed to please her, but she at once put it away as an absurdity.

"Besides you can't know much. But you'z cute."

Again that expression which seemed offensive to my self-love. I could not remain silent under so unworthy an estimate, and I retorted proudly,

"I can ride horseback."

I had sometimes been hoisted upon our farmer's blind mare, and had even experienced a disquietude akin to fear when long shivers ran through her body. My friend appeared enchanted and promised to lend me her black steed.

How does the grown-up heart differ from that of childhood? I had not the least idea of going with her. She did not suppose I was going. I had not the slightest equestrian ability. She had no authority over her horse; without mutual agreement each was conniving at luring the other on. It was a delicious foretaste of the falsehoods which lurk beneath all lovers' conversations.

Just then, as we both sat silent, a fearful and torturing memory came to me. One phrase — just a short phrase from the book of ballads which I had read and reread during my convalescence, until they seemed to form part of the very atmosphere of my existence, suddenly detached itself from the rest — I heard it within myself as if another than myself had uttered it. It was a line in the legend of The Lord of Burleigh. The Lord of Burleigh is speaking to a peasant girl, who is the prettiest and most modest girl in the village, and what he says is,

There is no one in the world whom I love like thee.

To be sure, I should never in the world have spoken those words aloud; I should even have closed my lips tight to make sure of not uttering them. But I felt them as living things, and they thrilled through me.

Now I discovered their prodigious meaning. How could one say such words to some one who was not of one's family, and whom one hardly knew? *No one in the world!* What about father — and mother? I dimly perceived the sacrilegious power of love, and while I was leaning over that abyss, Nazzarena, usually so grave, was laughing and showing her teeth.

One of the bronzed men of the troop passed, and stopped before us, scrutinising us. Then suddenly he knocked our two heads together, uttering in his jargon a word or two that I did not understand.

The touch of her cheek burned me, and violently pulling myself free I felt myself reddening to the very roots of my hair. She only laughed the more.

"What did he say?" I stammered, tossed between anger and a totally new emotion.

"Oh, nothing," said she. "That you were my little lover."

"I!" I protested. "What an idea!"

I could not consent that it should be possible. The love that one expressed must lose all importance. And what next? That way everything would be over. Surely, for love to be love one must keep it to oneself and it must hurt. . . .

III

THE PLOT

How was it that no one noticed, when I returned to the house, that I had suddenly changed and grown? I was almost scandalised at their blindness.

"Well, here you are!" observed my father, who was beginning to be uneasy about my absences.

Aunt Deen ran after me to make me put on another coat, more obviously worn. I had hastily slipped on my best, for my visit to Nazzarena. It may have been the memorable olive-green of my convalescence, at last become better adapted to my size after three or four years of growth, unless it had already been retired to a clothes press, in camphor and naphtha, until such time as James should grow to it. I commanded not the slightest respect, although the entire household ought to have been struck with my changed countenance. Instead of thinking only of my adventure, which indeed I could not quite understand, I was vexed with the familiarity with which I was treated.

We were all gathered in mother's room because of little Nicola, who was somewhat grippy, and who, being a delicate child, needed watchful care. Not-

withstanding my absorbing secret I felt that some important event was impending. The too turbulent Jamie was admonished to keep quiet in a corner. Mélanie, always somewhat in the moon — Aunt Deen insisted that she was listening to her voices, like Jeanne d'Arc — quietly undertook to amuse her sick sister, so that father was finally able to show mother the letter which he had in his hand.

"It is from Monseignor's secretary," he said as he opened it.

I thought he was speaking of the bishop, who always dined with us once a year. But the name of the Count de Chambord occurred in it. When he had finished reading it — I had not heard it distinctly — father added simply:

"Very well; I will present myself, since the prince desires that nothing be neglected for the welfare of the country."

"Oh, the prince!" murmured grandfather, smothering his little laugh.

Father looked at him with that straightforward, penetrating gaze which was always hard to bear. But grandfather at once put on his most innocent air, such as I remembered him to have assumed the time we met mamma in the street — when he said, "We are going to buy a paper."

I at once divined that father was the mysterious and terrible leader whose intervention in the assault upon the mayor's office Martinod had so feared. It could be no one but he, and how was it possible that

he should not win the battle? A look at him was enough. He bore victory about with him. My childish eyes, still loyal and clear-sighted, could see the signs of superiority radiating from his brow. How should I have guessed that superiority is a small factor in success, since all sorts of dubious weapons against it are being forged in dark places? I might indeed endeavour to escape from my father's influence, but at least I never dreamed of underrating it.

The watchful care usually extended to me was diminished by the illness of Nicola, who was always asking for her mother. I had remarked that father was making the most of his infrequent moments of leisure to talk with Mélanie, go out with Mélanie, take walks with Mélanie. More than ever he treated her with an affection at once tender and reserved, almost respectful, and seemed to extend his strength over her, as if some one was endangering his daughter or seeking to take her from him. As for Aunt Deen, who almost worshipped her nephews and nieces, individually and collectively, she remarked between going up and down stairs that I was a model child and an exemplary son, and even placed to her brother's credit a large part in this happy state of things.

I made the most of this relaxed vigilance, which in fact was merely comparative, to continue my visits to the circus in spite of the prohibition which had been put upon them. With a hypocrisy which had

already become perspicacious, I had persuaded myself that I was not disobeying when I walked around the tent to where the waggons were stationed. The side scenes are not the theatre. Thus from argument to argument I went on until at last I actually entered the tent. Had not grandfather taken me there the first time? He was the oldest, he ought to know better than any one else what was good for me. Besides, no one would know; there was no risk of any member of the family meeting me there, unless, indeed, grandfather. And Nazzarena rode her horse for me alone, and when she bowed courteously in response to the applause it was still for me alone. With all the ease in the world I suppressed the existence of the surrounding public.

Nevertheless, as my conscience was not perfectly easy, I clung to grandfather, who in case of need could ward off suspicions or bear the burden of responsibility. I even went with him to the Café des Navigateurs, though I had exhausted its pleasures and should have preferred another society. Martinod was unusually glad to see us.

"Father Rambert! What a pleasure to see you again! Father Rambert, sit here beside me in the place of honour."

I observed that if he had formerly excelled in passing over the bills to others, he now kept open purse not only for his own drinks but for those of others. Gallus and Merinos perceived it sooner than I did and refused themselves no indulgence. As for Cas-

enave and Galurin, they had never troubled themselves about the score. I had already before this remarked a complete change in Martinod; he was less and less concerned with oratorical effect, and no longer sought to dazzle us with descriptions of festivals where fraternal embraces were the general order. He produced lists and figures, enumerated proper names and with a bit of pencil which he moistened at his lips industriously addressed himself to checking them up.

A newspaper man having laid the local gazette upon a table, he called the servant to bring it to him in so imperious a voice that the girl was startled and came near upsetting a dish of food which she was carrying. Hardly had he unfolded the sheet when he cried:

"There it is! I was sure of it! *He* presents himself."

He had no need of being more definitely designated. Every one in the café unhesitatingly recognised him, and I as well as the others. Our group, which up to that moment had probably not felt sure that he would be a candidate, appeared to be deeply impressed and indeed quite demoralised. All wore long faces as they bent over their tumblers. Secretly scanning them one by one, as an impartial outsider, I considered their party, however numerous, quite incapable of carrying on a contest against my father.

Martinod permitted the others, and especially the neophytes who formed a sort of court around him,

and for whose drinks he paid, to start up, exclaim, though without naming the enemy, while he, inattentive or meditative, fixed grandfather with his eyes. As he continued for some time in this attitude, a passage from my natural history recurred to my mind, concerning a serpent that fascinated birds, and I laughed to myself at this absurd idea. For a long time he maintained his fixed gaze; then, after ordering drinks all around, except for me, whom he had forgotten, he leaned forward and in a fawning voice spoke in his neighbour's ear, but not so softly but that I heard.

"So, Father Rambert, you are no longer in your own house?"

"How so?" replied grandfather indifferently.

"Why, no; that fine château that you live in isn't yours now."

He pronounced the word *château* like the farmer, only omitting a few circumflex accents. Grandfather observed it, and it amused him. "Oho! the château," he said; "why not the palace?"

"Call it what you like, for all me," replied Martinod; "the fact remains that it is the finest residence in the country. And well situated — town and country at once. All the same, ha! ha! They have played you a trick, and you are no longer master of the house."

Grandfather scratched his eyebrow, then pulled his beard. He never spoke to any one of his abdication, not even to me in our walks, and I had per-

ceived that allusions to this old story, several years old now, did not interest him. I knew that he despised property and deemed it detrimental to the general good. But wasn't that a sacred dogma at the Café of the Navigators, too?

"Well, yes," he replied with a forced laugh. "I am no longer in my own house; there's a discovery for you! My poor Martinod, you are behind the times! It's many a long day since I've been in my own house and glad I am, as you see. No more bother, no more care. I am no longer the master, but I am my own master."

Upon this the dialogue proceeded, more and more gaily.

"Ta, ta, ta! At your age it's not easy to get used to camping in other folks' houses."

"At my age one likes peace and quiet."

"Yes, I know. They have relegated you to the end of the table."

"I put myself there of my own accord, and food tastes just as good there as in the middle."

"But here, Father Rambert, you have the place of honour."

"There is no place of honour in a café."

"And your room? — every one knows that you have been hoisted to the garret."

"Every one knows that I love heights."

All of which was said banteringly. They were playing at tossing questions and answers to and fro, as we tossed balls at school. Listening to them,

my mind was for a moment distracted from its absorbing sentiment, and I inwardly condemned myself for this as for a fault.

The subject soon became a theme for cheap pleasantries. Every one in the café began to talk of Father Rambert's end of the table, Father Rambert's garret. He would shrug his shoulders and take it all laughingly.

"Really, isn't all that true, Father Rambert?" asked Martinod one day.

"Why, to be sure it is true in a sense. If you make a point of it, it is true. But what is it that is true?"

As if everybody didn't know what is true and what is not true! Grandfather was rather fond of dark sayings. That same afternoon we went home together, he gay and sprightly, I downcast because I had not, even at a distance (which I preferred), seen Nazzarena. At the top of the steps we met father, who was waiting for us, and who seemed much disturbed. He had a newspaper crumpled up in his hand, and handed it without a word to grandfather, who made no motion to take it.

"Do you know who wrote *that?*" he asked. How contemptuously he pronounced the word *that!* I felt that he was controlling himself, but that something serious was going on at our house.

"How should I know?" asked grandfather. "I never read the local papers."

"Very well, read this one."

"No, thank you; I'm not interested."

"Then I'll read it to you."

"If you insist upon it."

I saw them go together into father's consulting room, leaving the door open, and I had no notion of going away. Grandfather sat down resignedly in an easy chair, and father began to read at once. I felt ill rewarded for the curiosity which had kept me there, for I couldn't understand a word of that dull, prosy and ill-worded article, which seemed to leave a bad taste in your mouth like grated cheese that melts in onion soup and turns into a sticky glue that clings to your gums. It was about the approaching elections, and a certain omnipotent and despotic personage, eager to rule the public with a rod of iron as he ruled his household. After this there was something about a garret full of rats, exposed to all the winds of heaven, yet good enough, it appeared, for the miserable old man who had been relegated to it, and who was expiating his social kindliness by being treated with contempt and forced into the meanest position in his own house. The article closed with a warm appeal to justice and sympathy. No name, no place, was mentioned. How could I have understood the illusions? It was too complicated an act of perfidy for a child to see through.

"Is that all?" asked grandfather when the indignant voice was silent.

"It seems to me that it is enough."

"Oh, there isn't enough there to whip a cat for — mere vague generalities."

"Is that your opinion?" asked father. "Don't you feel how venomous, and how dishonouring to me it all is? Have not you always been well treated here? Whose wish was it to sit at the end of the table? Who took possession of the tower chamber in spite of all we could say? Which of us has ever been lacking in respect to you? When has any one neglected to care for you most tenderly and deferentially? Of whom, of what, do you complain? Father, I entreat you,— tell me; this is a grave matter."

Entreaty followed entreaty, hurrying one upon another, in a voice which gave them a pathetic intonation that thrilled me from head to foot. The obscure article suddenly became clear to me, and I grasped its entire significance. Some one was accusing my father of harshness to grandfather. The scene of the abdication rose up before me, and the morning in which I had borne a part by carrying the pile of *Limping Messengers of Berne and Vevey*.

"I am not complaining," said grandfather; "I have never complained."

"And of what could you have complained? This house has continued to be yours. I have taken upon myself only the duties and expenses which were a burden to you. But these calumnies have not been invented."

"My dear Michel, all these stories bore me to

death. I don't read the newspapers, and get along very comfortably without them. I advise you to follow my example."

"Because it is not you who are attacked. Because I shall never permit any one to attack you. This attack upon me comes from the Café of the Navigators. I am sure that you still go there, though I have informed you that it is the headquarters of our enemies. But you place in those people all the confidence that you refuse to me."

"As for that, I go where I please and I see whom I like."

"You are free, father, without the slightest doubt. But in a family all the members stand or fall together. Whoever aims at you strikes me. Whoever defames me insults you."

"I have no such narrow views as to the family. I have never opposed you; do the same to me."

At that moment father saw me through the half-open door, and a suspicion must have crossed his mind, for he cut the discussion short, and pointing to me said,

"I hope you never take that child there!"

"Where, pray?"

"To the Café of the Navigators."

And turning to me father added in a tone which admitted of no reply, "Go away!"

So that I did not hear the reply.

I have forgotten no incident of that scene and am certain of having reconstructed it in its integrity,

and if not in the same words at least in equivalent ones. As I had been successively born into a mysterious longing by a word of the shepherd who was leading his sheep to the mountain, into the knowledge of liberty by a walk with grandfather in the wild forest, into the sense of beauty by having met the lady in white, into the disquietude of love because Nazzarena had told me with a laugh that I was her little lover, so now I was born into a knowledge of human wickedness, to which all my childhood had been a stranger. Aunt Deen's famous *they*, at whom I scoffed after having vainly sought them around me, did then exist, and Martinod was one of them, and the gentle and gay Casenave, whom my father had cured, and the old photographer Galurin, and the two artists!

This unexpected revelation completely upset me. People went to the café to enjoy themselves and not to hatch plots. They drank vari-coloured drinks and made jokes the while. No, it could not be possible! A doubt swept over me, both because of grandfather's calmness, and because the "go away" which dismissed me had been somewhat brusque and aroused in me a desire to take the other side. Perhaps that scrap of paper was indeed not worth reading.

The next day I was in mother's room when father came in with his hat on, coming straight in from outside without stopping in the vestibule. He took off his hat hastily, and we saw that his face was ani-

mated and suffused with colour. He had his grand air of a battle, and he laughed as if pleased.

"I have slapped Martinod's face," he said simply, as if he had said, "I have been to see such and such a patient."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" murmured my mother; "what will he invent against you now?"

I heard Aunt Deen running heavily, shaking the floor, rushing in like a whirlwind. She had heard my father's words from a distance.

"Well done, Michel; well done!" she cried, all out of breath. "They are beaten; well done!"

There was one who didn't haggle over the defence of the house!

I made the most of the unusual excitement to steal away. I had no objection to Martinod being slapped, so long as I profited by it in some way. I had been feeling myself more closely watched; opportunities to slip away were becoming rare. With all speed I made off to the street and rushed in the direction of the town. But as soon as I reached the Market Place I began to walk slowly, even putting on an unconcerned, indifferent manner, as of a loiterer who has no special point in view and doesn't quite know where he is going. Thus I proceeded toward the circus, and started to walk around it, being careful to look about me carelessly, to show plainly that I was walking without a purpose. No one could be mistaken. How many times had I executed this little manœuvre and not always with

success! If Nazzarena was there, occupied with some household duty, that was no reason why I should approach her, or even greet her. As a general thing I went past her without speaking, stiff as a poker. Our first conversation had exhausted my courage, and moreover I did not know what to talk about next. Sometimes she would laugh at me as she saw me pass — for when it came to playing with me or mocking at me she would lay aside her professional gravity as a horsewoman. Sometimes she would call me. I always went to her at her call, but not for worlds would I have spoken first.

That day she was leading her horse to water at the public fountain. Seen without his trappings and the blaze of torches with which the tent was lighted during performances, this steed appeared to me singularly like our farmer's old blind mare that I had occasionally bestridden; it was a long bony beast, continually wrinkling his skin all over his body to shake off the flies. But I immediately closed my eyes to so pitiful a sight, and imagined in its place the red roan steed of the Romance of the Swan's Nest which, in my book of ballads, bore the Knight to the young girl sitting in the grass by the river side, her bare feet in the water.

My adored one was absorbed in her work, or pretended to be, and did not deign to observe my presence. There was nothing for it but to keep on my way, since she would not turn her eyes toward me. And that horse kept on drinking, as if he were capa-

ble of drinking the fountain dry. It was enough to make one desperate! At last she turned her head. She was laughing. The naughty girl! She had seen me then! But in her most natural tone, as if she had suddenly discovered me, she bade me good morning.

Having given up hope of her speaking, I found nothing to say. My discomfited face no doubt betrayed my feelings, for she seemed not displeased with my silence, and even spoke of it:

"So, you are dumb to-day?" she asked, laughing all the more heartily as she added, "Aha! so you aren't my little lover any more?"

I hung my head to conceal my embarrassment. Not love her any more! The foolish question! When one loved it was for always. The word *always*, which my lips could never have uttered, made a strange music in my heart, so sweet that nothing sweeter could ever be heard in the world.

Reassured as to my condition, and no doubt as to the effect she produced upon me, she calmly pulled the halter. Her horse had ceased to drink and from his moist nostrils drops of water were falling back into the basin.

IV

MY BETRAYAL

Because of that word *always*, continually singing in my heart, the days that followed were at once delicious and bitter, like the fruit that I used to gather too early in the garden. I was sure of the future and indeed of all eternity, enjoying to the full the love that as yet asks for nothing outside of itself. For the slight distress that I had felt at the contact of Nazzarena's cheek when our heads had been jokingly bumped together had soon passed; nothing indeed was lacking to fill the cup of my happiness but never to see my beloved; my embarrassment returned whenever we met. If at least I had not been obliged to speak to her! I could not have endured to kiss her — I never so much as touched her hand. Each of us — so I think now — perhaps believed in the superiority of the other: she because my house was so solid, and I because of her horse, her golden robe, her talent as a horsewoman, her wandering life, and that indefinable something with which love endowed her. She soon perceived that the two sides were not equal: she could appear in public and be applauded; I was a mere spectator.

Conscious of her domination, she no longer shrank

from laying commands upon me. She would ask little services of me,— to buy her a thimble in town, or gold thread and needles to mend her fine robe; and to ask for things used by girls and not by boys made me blush in the shop. If I had to add some complementary explanations, I didn't know where to turn to hide myself. She made me help her peel potatoes and delighted in my embarrassment when she saw me casting furtive glances toward the open square.

"Don't worry, little man; no one is passing," she would say, robbing me at a blow of all the benefit of my heroism.

Every day, either morning or evening, I would somehow manage to come home from school by way of the Market Place where she was living. What stratagems were mine to avoid suspicion! Sometimes my parents would come to walk home with me, or, the distance not being great, would merely meet me a few steps from the gate. How did I manage not to arouse their misgivings? One or another of my school fellows having discovered my manœuvres tried to make fun of me, but Fernand de Montraut's intervention spared me the vexation of practical jokes. As the boys urged upon him that I refused to talk about the little horsewoman he pronounced my silence chivalrous; and this opinion, from so competent a judge, filled me with pride.

The same tawny young man who had knocked our heads together, finding me one day in conversation

with Nazzarena, jabbered something again in their jargon, pointing his finger at me, and both burst out laughing. As for me, I could have cried.

By degrees this passion, greater than I, and too serious for my fourteen years, made a chasm between me and my family, all unawares to myself. I forgot the elections, and the newspaper article, and Martinod's slapped face, which had brought about none of the immediate results that mother had dreaded. At the same time I would gladly have made a confidant of grandfather, because of our visits to the pavilion and also because of the lady in white, the memory of whom, until then somewhat vague, was now definitely fixed in my mind. Like a bouquet of fresh flowers I breathed in all the romance of our former walks. Their charm mysteriously affected me — was it not to them that I owed the precocious emotions of my excited sensibilities? But for them I should probably have been thinking only of playing tricks upon my teachers, or at most of enjoying these first days of spring without knowing why.

One Thursday afternoon — our holiday was Thursday — as I had with some difficulty escaped to the circus, to enjoy the performance and gaze upon my horsewoman, who that day did not deign to notice me, not knowing how to go back to the house without attracting attention, I decided to go to the Café of the Navigators, where there was some chance of

meeting grandfather. The discussion between him and my father on this subject had already slipped my mind, and my only object was to get home without questionings, with no thought of Martinod and his acolytes. I half opened the door with beating heart; it was the first time that I had entered such a place alone. Grandfather was there; I was saved! So long as I went home under his protection no questions would be asked, and my absence would be justified by the very fact.

I seated myself in a corner to wait until he was ready to go. Near me Martinod was talking with the head of the establishment. I knew him, for he used to mingle familiarly with the patrons, and even in his days of prodigal humour, he would treat them all round.

"You see," he was saying in a tearful voice, "the bill has been running several years."

"Send it to the son," Martinod advised.

"It is not his affair."

"All the same, you'll see that he will pay it. That I can guarantee. It's a good trick to pay him against the elections. And besides, the boy has had some."

Whom was he talking about? I had not noticed. But suddenly Martinod gazed at me, and under that gaze I at once remembered the slap he had received. I even felt a vague remorse at being in his company; but grandfather had surely kept on going with him.

After all, he had received and not given the slap, and here he was, raising his arm to heaven as if some one had committed an unpardonable crime against me:

"That child has nothing to drink!"

I should never have believed him so solicitous with regard to me. Everybody had neglected me for a long time, and in fact, but for the passion which absorbed me, and inclined me to privations for the very love of suffering, I should have observed the infrequency of the glasses of syrup. The oversight was immediately repaired. The materials generally reserved for full grown men were set before me; I was solemnly offered a *verte* — of course an attenuated, diluted, inoffensive *verte.*

"I will mix it myself," declared Martinod.

"I'll leave it to you," observed grandfather indifferently, interrupting himself in a heated discussion with Gallus as to the Andante of Bach's second sonata for piano and violin. "And no practical jokes."

"Father Rambert, don't you worry!"

Certainly that Martinod was a good fellow, agreeable and slow to take offence. His cheek was perhaps still warm from that slap, and he was caring for me as for his own youngster!

He didn't mix it the same way grandfather did. The superimposed lumps of sugar were melted; now he might pour the absinthe. Upon my word! He

surely was treating me seriously and not like a baby gorged with milk! That brew must be extraordinary!

I tasted it and pronounced it delicious, without knowing why, the better to play my own part; and this gained me the suffrages of Casenave and Galurin.

"That's the first," they declared, "but it shall not be the last."

I was almost the object of an ovation, and in gratitude I turned upon Martinod a humid eye. But why did he look at me in silence with that compassionate look? Had I a papier-mâché countenance? He finally leaned over me and whispered in my ear a few simple words that completed my disquietude:

"Poor little fellow!"

Why under the sun did he call me poor little fellow? Did I look as wretched as that? No doubt I hadn't succeeded in seeing Nazzarena the whole day long. Yes, to be sure, I was unhappy, since everybody noticed it. Only no one ought to notice it. This was a secret, hidden in the very bottom of my heart, and no one had any right to speak to me of it. I at once assumed a repellant face, intended to discourage sympathy. But I couldn't keep up this attitude. Ever since I emptied my glass, I felt, as it were, a veil before my eyes, and a warmth through all my body, an enervating torpor, and a sort of longing for confidence and affection. Furthermore, I had been mistaken as to Martinod's intentions. He was not thinking of my love, he knew

nothing about it, and with small respect to consistency I began now to regret that I didn't hear him pronounce Nazzarena's name. He was fascinating me with his gaze, as the serpent in my natural history must have fascinated the birds, and in a voice of caressing inflections, insinuating, coaxing, he gave me to understand that in my family I was misunderstood. In ambiguous words, with all sorts of circumlocutions, hesitations, reticences, he revealed to me that my father cared more for one of his older sons than for me. Which one? Stephen or Bernard? At this distance of time I do not remember which one he indicated. Was it Bernard, for his military air, his decided manner, his gaiety, his enthusiasm, and his resemblance to father? Or Stephen, for his fine and even temper, his good marks, his application, even his absence of mind? Upon my word I can not say which, now. Our parents treated us without the slightest difference, and each one was the object of special attention which he was free to consider a favour. Still, I did not hesitate to believe this stranger who did not know us, who had never set foot in our house, and who, I knew, had been chastised by my father for his perfidy.

Yes, I was misunderstood by my family. Imperceptible proofs started up from the shadows, and grew like clouds chased before the wind. My father was always talking about the absent ones, and when he received news of them he was radiant. Their

letters were bulletins of victory. He wore paternal pride upon his forehead. I, I alone, was systematically kept in the background, I was of no consequence. How severely, the other week, he had cried "go away!" Did he know that I was frequenting the circus in spite of his prohibition, and that I peeled potatoes in the public square? If Bernard or Stephen had been the offender he would have come to know it, and would have scolded them, whereas he treated me with outrageous contempt; I, who was bearing the burden of so noble a love, I was treated only with humiliation and insult. Worst of all, worst of all, my father did not love me — nobody loved me. Everything conspired to make me think so, since I had not once met Nazzarena that whole day long! There was only grandfather, and grandfather was absorbed in his conversations, his music, in smoking his pipe, in his telescope and his almanacs.

I cast an imploring glance in his direction. Now he was waxing warm with Gallus over a quintette by Schumann. At such a time the world did not exist for him.

I would have consented to get along without the existence of the world, provided he would concern himself with me. I had the horrible sensation of being abandoned by every one, and that this man close at hand who insinuated his sympathy in a moved and compassionate voice had just informed me of an irreparable misfortune. I could have cried, but in the face of curious looks I kept back my

tears. But on that bench, in that café, I learned to know the sadness of being misunderstood, of solitude in the midst of a crowd, of despair. Life is made up of many griefs; have I ever experienced a more intense pain than this imaginary despair?

Thus disarmed by the very tenderness that bared my sensibility to the quick, and fascinated by the serpent, I unconsciously entered into the plot which was being concocted against my father. Having accomplished his purpose — more easily than he had believed possible, for he was unaware that love was his ally — Martinod repeated in a heart-rending tone,

"Poor little fellow!"

My stifled sobs were suffocating me. He might blazen his triumph abroad, for he had succeeded even beyond his hopes; the seed of his suggestions was destined to spring up later and bear noxious fruit. But had he not found an easy prey?

I was still too unsophisticated to know that hate can flatter and smile, look pleasant, appear sympathetic or compassionate, and enwrap its object in fine phrases as bandits bind ropes about the man they would render powerless. Hatred of this sort, which with affected sympathy addresses itself to the friends and relations of the man it pursues, certain of wounding him on the rebound, can not always be denounced even later. There are few sentinels like Aunt Deen to keep guard over the sacred ark of the family.

It has been said that circumstances conspired to further Martinod's plan. One Sunday afternoon, as I was idling at the window instead of finishing a task — I usually preferred grandfather's tower chamber, but he was absent — I suddenly beheld a wonderful, a terrifying sight! The circus troop was invading our garden! They had come through the gate, which, notwithstanding Aunt Deen's vigilance, had been left open because of the more frequent comings and goings of a holiday. The whole company was swarming over the grass plats and shamelessly trampling the flower borders. There were ragged women with babies in their arms, there were the two clowns whom I had in time come to identify, there was the grey-headed rope dancer and there — oh, woe! there was Nazzarena herself! Nazzarena without a hat, her hair unbound and her dress in rags. For the first time I realised that she was poor. In our garden, in the carefully tended alley, one might have taken her for a poor country girl.

Dumb with amazement, I dared neither hide nor lean out of the window. Terror at what was sure to happen paralysed me. Why had they come? What did they want? What ill wind had brought them? Our garden was not a place for wandering folk, bohemians, people whose only knowledge of land was to walk upon it. If only it had been the old-time garden, overgrown with weeds, never pruned nor watered! Or if only grandfather had been there

to receive these suspicious guests! Nazzarena, Nazzarena, hasten back to your *roulotte* and the white tent in which you reign! I assure you that this is no place for you!

I was actually undergoing martyrdom on seeing them thus shamelessly making merry over our grass and flowers. I longed at heart to cry out, to warn them, but I could not. And in infinite agony I measured the distance which separated the house from my love.

One of the clowns was already ringing the door bell. My God! what would happen next? They had hardly begun to parley with Mariette, whose uncompromising humours I knew, when the catastrophe fell upon us. Aunt Deen came flying to the rescue and stoutly made head against the whole band. The dialogue was distinctly audible at my window:

"What do you people want?"

A chirping voice replied:

"This is Father Rambert's house, isn't it?"

"What do you want with Father Rambert? Go about your business. Get out!"

What abominable injustice! All the beggars of our town were always kindly treated by us; they even had their days, like society ladies, and Zeeze Million, who was crazy, and that drunkard Yes-Yes received a regular allowance at our door. Then why not give these honourable acrobats a chance to

explain? Aunt Deen, always so charitable and ready to help, was turning them out with harsh words merely because they were strangers!

Thus ignominiously ordered out, they rebelled, and poured invectives upon their persecutor, who, I must admit, was not mute.

An infernal uproar arose. The rope dancer yelled, beating her sides. At last I resolved to intervene in behalf of my friends, Nazzarena's friends. Suddenly, at the very moment when I was about to quit my post of observation to fly to the fray, my father, no doubt drawn by the uproar, appeared upon the scene. Without so much as opening his lips, with a single gesture — but how unanswerable! — he pointed to the entrance. And the whole roaring troop retreated, crowding between the two pillars that supported the gate, and fled, immediately and most astonishingly.

I was furious at so sudden and complete a rout. Since it was thus, I, by myself alone, would resist that authority which no one ever dared to brave. All my new-found enthusiasm again sweeping over me, I rushed to the stairs, flew down four steps at a time at the risk of *carabossing* myself, to overtake my beloved.

"Where are you going?" asked father, still at his post, and barring my way.

I was silent. My enthusiasm was already falling flat.

"Go back at once," he went on. "I forbid you to go out."

Unhesitatingly, but swelling with wrath, I went upstairs, gnawing my fists with rage. Was *no* one to resist him, then? I, too, like those others, had been immediately vanquished, overthrown, petrified, merely by having faced him. People think it is easy to revolt against the powers that be: I had just learned that that depends upon the character of the government. Again and again I went over Martinod's insinuations. How true they were! *He* understood; *he* was a true friend!

I had only obeyed in appearance. I had hardly reached the tower when I began to listen for the sound of closing doors, and no sooner was I convinced that my father had gone back to his study than I furtively crept down and slipped out of the house. Once beyond the gate new courage inspired me: I straightened up and breathed freely. This time, I had no thought of taking a roundabout way, putting on airs of indifference, deceiving any whom I might meet, but ran by the shortest road to the Market Square. The gipsies were rolling up the tent, piling up the benches, the Sunday loiterers looking on with interest. This raising of the camp boded ill — I saw Nazzarena at last; she was gathering together the scattered household utensils. This was no time to be bashful: it called for heroic resolution. In the very face of all the spectators,

most of whom doubtless knew the Rambert boy, I flew to my beloved, like one of the knights of my ballads. When she saw me she cast a heart-broken glance upon me.

"They drove us out of your garden," she said before I had spoken a word.

How reply to this grievous statement? No doubt she included me among her persecutors.

"It wasn't I!" I cried, hasting to separate myself from my family.

"Of course it wasn't you," she replied philosophically. "You are too little. We went to tell your grandfather that we are going away to-morrow. To-morrow morning."

"To-morrow!" I repeated, as if I had not heard, or had not understood.

"Yes, to-morrow. See for yourself. They are loading the things on the waggons now. The Marinetti brothers have left us. There'll be no matinée to-day — that's one good haul lost."

To my surprise, she was not angry with me for her expulsion, and even in my grief I observed an unexpected reversal of parts: she was showing an unaccustomed consideration for me, and I was taking on a little protecting air. The prestige of power was doing its work all unawares to myself. Thus she did not suggest that I should help her in her work, though the day before she would not have failed to do so.

One of the old hags stuck her long yellow face

out of the nearest waggon, and upbraided her for wasting her time.

"I must go," said Nazzarena. "Such a job to get ready for moving! Good-bye, good-bye, my little lover! I wish you another sweetheart; you's cute; you'll find one."

She did not offer her hand; perhaps she dared not, because of the respect for me which the sight of the house had inspired in her. And I found no words in which to reply to her. I smiled foolishly at her strange wish for me: it seemed abominable and sacrilegious, though the affectionate way in which she uttered it was as sweet to me as a caress. Her departure floored me — seemed to cut my legs and arms and empty my brain. I stood there like a dolt. Time and place were nothing to me — she was going away!

I saw her in the distance, stumbling under the heavy trappings of her horse, and she made a little gesture of adieu as she disappeared behind one of the waggons. It seemed to me as if she was already far off, and I managed to walk away.

Where should I go? Associating the cruelty of my family with Nazzarena's departure, I could not go back home. What consolation, what support would I have found there? Father had forbidden me to go out: I could judge of the reception which awaited me. I wandered up and down the streets among the people in their Sunday best, absent-mindedly bumping against one or another, who

hurled at me the epithet of blockhead, or boor. I almost enjoyed it, so tempestuously did I long to change the character of my pain. Powerless to direct my steps, I automatically found myself at the Café des Navigateurs. Grandfather would understand me; grandfather was the embodiment of that security for which that dear Martinod was working.

The room was crowded, and I suddenly felt comforted by the atmosphere of tobacco and anise, the stir and movement. I lost the immediate sense of my grief, I was even able to perceive distinctly that something solemn and unusual was going on. A decision of capital importance had been arrived at, and from the way they were talking it seemed to me that this was one of those historic events that by and by boys would study in school. Grandfather was the object of a thousand testimonials of honour and admiration. They were crowding around him, congratulating him, shaking hands with him, though this he resisted. And champagne was being brought — highest favour! Champagne on a day like this! I began to feel deeply moved, all the more that no one offered me any.

"A goblet!" cried Martinod, that dear Martinod who certainly *was* good to me; "a goblet for the little fellow!"

And lifting high his own, with a grand gesture he proclaimed,

"To the election of Father Rambert! To the victory of the Republic!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed the faithful Galurin.

Gallus and Merinos were overflowing with happiness: no doubt they were foreseeing that era of Beauty which they had so often anticipated in my hearing. As for Casenave, he was supporting the weight of his head with both hands, his vague eyes perhaps fixed upon some vision. The barmaid was inclining the bottle over his glass: he may have seen in her one of those beautiful ladies in empire gowns who used to come down through the ceiling of his garret to give him drinks and visit him openly.

"*Ziou!*" he exclaimed, sitting up.

As he gazed upon the frothing beverage, and the golden stream, he was seized with a convulsive shudder. His trembling hands failed to grasp the goblet, and he hiccoughed with impotent greed.

Grandfather alone showed no enthusiasm nor even pleasure. His ill-humour was evident. He found small enjoyment in popularity or applause. All this open-mouthed, drinking, shouting crowd got on his nerves. I am sure he would rather have been somewhere else — in the country — for instance, eating strawberries and sweet cream. Still, he was constrained to yield before the general enthusiasm.

"After all, it is perhaps well," he conceded. "No tyrants, above all; liberty!"

No, indeed; no tyrants! In an instant the vision of my father rose before me, standing on the doorstep, his extended arm driving away those poor gip-

sies. And by way of protest, I emptied my goblet.

At that precise moment — so long as I live I shall never forget the sight — father entered the Café des Navigateurs. Unheard-of act! My back was turned to the door, so that I could only see him in the mirror. But it was Martinod's face that told me of his presence. Martinod had suddenly turned pale, and the hand which held his glass trembled like that of Casenave, so that a little champagne slopped over. Father, before whom every one hastily gave way as before an important personage, or as if in fear, was already at our table. He raised his hat, saying most courteously,

"Good day, gentlemen. I have come for my son."

No one spoke. There was utter silence, not only in our group but all through the room, every one attentive to the incident. The apparition of Nazzarena in the circus upon her black horse would not have aroused so much interest. The only sound was the exclamation, "Oh!" uttered by the proprietor, who, napkin in hand, stood motionless behind the bar.

Grandfather was the first to regain self-possession. He remarked, calmly, almost impertinently:

"Good afternoon, Michel. Will you take something with us?"

The offer was received by the bystanders with mocking little laughs and all tongues were unloosed. But the diversion was of brief duration. Father

merely replied, "Thank you, I came for my son. It is nearly dinner time, and we are expecting you both."

Thus he invited grandfather to go with us. Perceiving that his invitation was not accepted, he turned to Martinod, who was giggling, and measured him from head to foot.

"See here, Monsieur Martinod, since I have removed my hat, I beg you to remove yours."

It is true that Martinod had kept his hat on, but I knew that it was the custom in the café. Far from complying with the order — no one could mistake that it was an order, notwithstanding the "I beg you" — he hastened to pull his hat lower on his head. Interested and enthralled, every one in the room was watching, and a wag in the corner ejaculated:

"He will. He will not."

My father took a step forward, and to me he seemed a very giant. Alone among them all, it was he who spread terror. In that clear voice that I so well knew, the voice that moved Tem Bossette in the depths of his vines and brought the whole household together in an instant, he said:

"Do you wish me to knock off your hat with my cane, Monsieur Martinod? For my hand will never touch you again."

This time the laughs ceased. The case was becoming tragic: one might have heard a spider spinning her web. Grandfather saved the situation.

"Come, Martinod," he said; "one must be polite."

"Then it's for you, Father Rambert," Martinod replied, suddenly uncovering. His face was bloodless, and no one could doubt of his defeat.

My father, having conquered, turned to Casenave, lost in his dreams.

"You, too, friend, would do well to go home."

The terrified Casenave cried in a melancholy voice which broke the tension, so droll did it seem.

"I haven't been drinking, Doctor. I swear I haven't."

Thereupon we went out, father and I; I behind him, and though the crowded tables were full of company, I moved between them without difficulty, so large was the place respectfully made for my guide. By way of not resembling Martinod, whose cowardice disgusted me, I forced myself to hold up my head and appear indifferent. At the bottom of my heart I was in unspeakable dread of what might happen in the street, when we were alone. Never, save perhaps in my earliest childhood, had my parents inflicted corporal punishment upon us: self-esteem was a part of our education. But now I expected it. If only he didn't slap my face like Martinod! Martinod was an enemy of the house and I had drunk his champagne. Little did I care for the house, however; like grandfather, I proposed to be free. Hadn't grandfather taken a gun when he had

failed *in the blood of the days of June*, against the prohibition of his own father, the magistrate, the nurseryman, whom he held in such slight esteem? They might beat me, might abuse me, but they should get nothing out of me. I braced myself against the terror which was gripping me, until I at last came to feel a sort of insensibility, a strength of resistance which enabled one to endure anything without uttering a complaint.

I had, however, no occasion to make use of the provision of energy which I was laying in against my martyrdom. As we walked along father merely asked me, without raising his voice,

"Have you often been to that café?"

"Sometimes."

"Never set foot in it again."

I felt that indeed I never could set foot in it again. But would that be all my punishment? We were walking side by side, very fast. Though he gave no sign of what he was thinking, I understood,— I can not tell how — that a great tempest was inwardly agitating him. He had it in his power to crush me, to break me in two, and he kept silent. Thus we crossed the Market Place, and I seemed to myself like one of those criminals whom I had seen escorted to prison by a gendarme. If only Nazzarena did not see me! To me she represented the life of liberty, as I was slavery in person.

At last we reached the door of the house. Be-

fore opening it father turned to me, covering me from head to foot with a look, under which I hung my head in spite of myself, like one guilty.

"Poor child!" he said — it was Martinod's very expression —"what are they trying to make of you?"

In my tense condition this sudden pity conquered my rebellion, and I was on the point of throwing myself into his arms with tears. But he had already regained his self-control, and in his tone of command he went on:

"You simply must obey. You simply must."

I at once hardened my heart again. He was affirming his authority: and though he had certainly not abused it, there was for me only the sacred war for independence.

Mother, whose anxious shadow I had distinguished behind the window, was watching for our return, and came to the top of the steps to meet us.

"He was there," said my father simply. "I was not mistaken."

"Oh, my God!" she murmured, as if she could not have imagined so tragic a misfortune.

Aunt Deen, who was close behind her, lifted up her hands to heaven:

"It's not possible! It's not possible!"

Beyond this I was not scolded. With his will or against his will the prodigal son had been brought back. But, far from being grateful for this indulgence, which now I better understand as being due

to the uncertainty of my parents as to the influences to which I had been subject, and the best way of winning me back, I tried to revive with all my recovered strength the love-pain which had been dulled by all these incidents, saying over and over to myself,

"Nazzarena is going to-morrow. Nazzarena is going to-morrow."

V

THE DOUBLE LIFE

I HARDLY slept that night, and in my half slumber I confused the holy war for independence with my loss of Nazzarena. My love was a part of that liberty which grandfather vaunted, and for which he had carried a gun. When morning came it found me firmly resolved not to go to school, but to take my last chance of being present when the circus troop departed. The farewell of the evening before had been disappointing. Not being prepared, I had found nothing to say. Surely, things couldn't end that way.

I complained of a headache, and found ready credence. I understood that I was supposed to be upset by the scene in the Café of the Navigators. Aunt Deen even brought me secretly a frothing and tasty mulled egg, good for headaches, and so delicious that I enjoyed it in spite of my grief — at which I was inwardly humiliated.

"You'll stay in bed till noon," she said, as she carried away the cup, adding — she, too! —

"Poor child!"

At which my gratitude to her immediately van-

ished, for I had no idea of being considered a child any longer, since I was in love.

As soon as she was gone I dressed hastily, but not without a certain care, and ran up to the tower chamber, where grandfather received me with surprise, and some signs of pleasure.

"They let you come up?" he asked.

Why should he ask? I had asked permission of no one. He merely shrugged his shoulders and became the philosopher once more —"Oh, it's all the same to me."

The four windows of the tower commanded all the roads. It was my plan to watch from this look-out for the train of waggons. They were loaded, they would advance slowly. I calculated that I should have time to overtake them. Which way would they go? I had no notion. I imagined that they would take the road for Italy, and I watched that one especially.

I had stationed myself before one of the windows, half hidden by a piece of furniture, when there came a knock at the door and father entered. I thought he had come for me, and I at once knew that in spite of my resolutions I should not resist. He had the same calm and irresistible air of authority that he had had the evening before; but, absorbed in his purpose, he did not so much as see me, and as he walked directly to grandfather he even turned his back to me. Unless I intervened he would not know I was there. After a brief but courteous salutation he

showed the newspaper he had in his hand — a local journal.

"This paper announces that you are presenting yourself for election at the head of the list of the Left. Is that so, father?"

I could divine under the interrogative form of the simple phrase that he was inwardly boiling with restrained anger.

At the gate of the town there was a blank wall overlooking the lake, which was always swept by waves on windy or stormy days. My school fellows and I used sometimes to amuse ourselves by running across between two waves, at the risk of being wet by spray or even drenched by some larger wave. On certain days when the storm was severe, such bravado was impossible. We used to say then that the tempest-tossed lake was smoking. I had the sensation now that my way would be barred in the same manner.

How can I have forgotten one traitor word of the conversation that followed? Grandfather, according to his habit, merely replied — at once gently and bravely (he detested scenes and usually avoided them, but Martinod's cowardice was not his style):

"I am free, I suppose."

"No one is free," replied my father, with a determined evenness of voice which chilled me to the marrow. "All of us depend upon one another. And you are aware that you are presenting yourself against me."

This time grandfather's retort was more sharp. He would not give way, he would defend himself. At last!

"I am presenting myself against no one," he replied. "I simply present myself — that is all. And I hinder no one from presenting himself. I say again, Michel, every one is free to act according to his good pleasure."

With an eloquence which gradually grew warm, and which he then interrupted, as if determined not to depart from the most respectful form of speech, constantly struggling to control himself against the vehemence of his own words, father sought to convince him by a line of argument which even at this distance I believe I can recall. Why this candidacy at the last moment when grandfather had never dreamed of taking any part in politics, and when he knew that his son was the head of the conservative party? How was it that he did not see that this was a manœuvre of Martinod, who was only too happy to take revenge for the blow he had received, and to effect the disintegration of the Rambert family? Surely no one would allow himself to be taken in Martinod's coarse trap!

"And besides," he concluded, "we can not be candidates against one another."

Grandfather's little laugh accompanied his answer: "Oho! Why not? It will be something new, and for my part I see no harm in it."

"Because a family can not be divided."

"A family! A family! You always have that word in your mouth. Individuals are of some account, too, I suppose. And besides, why aren't your convictions the same as mine, since you are my son?"

"You forget that my convictions are the same as those of all our family down to your father."

"Yes, the nurseryman. You forget the soldier of the Emperor . . ."

"He served France. France comes first. I do not include those who emigrated."

"And your great uncle Philippe Rambert, the *sans-culotte?*"

"Don't let us speak of him; he is our shame. Every family has its tradition. Ours, until you, was simple and fine. 'God and the King.'"

"Well, liberty is enough for me. Once for all, I leave you your way; let me have mine."

"But I repeat to you that the solidarity of our name and our race lays an obligation upon you. Besides, your liberty is a mere chimera. We are all in a state of dependence. Will you force me to remind you that I have accepted this dependence with all its cost? The very house which shelters us, and which I have saved, is a witness to the permanence and unity of the family under one roof."

By degrees the conversation became a battle. Father seemed to me so big and powerful that he could have crushed grandfather with a snap of the finger, and yet grandfather held out against him, with his sharp little voice, and with a vigour such as

I hardly recognised in him. To see them thus drawn up against each other frightened me and gave me horrible torment. In my new-born rebellion against authority my heart was with grandfather. I pictured to myself, under Nazzarena's features, that liberty of which they were speaking in attack and defence. It seemed to me that I should be committing a cowardly act like that of Martinod in the Café des Navigateurs when he took off his hat in obedience to orders, showing his white, terrified face, if I did not intervene in behalf of my companion, my comrade in walks, who had transmitted to me as a brilliant inheritance — the only one he had to give — his love of simple nature, of the wandering life, of that independence which proudly refuses to submit to rule, and perhaps also that love of love which by itself alone includes all these. I did not conceal from myself the risk I was running. I foresaw the punishment which would follow, and yet I came forward like a little martyr asking for death.

"Grandfather is free!" I cried at the top of my voice.

I had thought to utter a tremendous shout, but I could hardly hear my own voice, and was astonished and vexed that I had not made more noise. Nevertheless, I perceived the immediate effect, which though quite enough to satisfy me, was far from reassuring. My father had turned suddenly, amazed at my presence and audacity. This time the road was closed, like that of the lakeside on stormy days. He gazed

at us both by turns as if to discover some complicity, some understanding between us. Face to face with him we were really just nothing at all. He was strong enough to crush us both. His eyes flashed fire; his voice would roll over us like thunder; the storm that was about to overwhelm us would be terrible.

Why did he keep silent? What was he waiting for? Still he said nothing, and the silence became more distressing, more tragic. I could hear my own terror like the tick tock of a clock.

Having taken time to regain his self-control, by what must have been a superhuman effort, he turned from me that gaze that so terrified me, and spoke to grandfather:

"Very well," he said, so calmly and gently that it disconcerted me; "I am no longer a candidate. We will not amuse the city with the sight of our divisions. But I will permit myself to give you one bit of advice. By my retirement Martinod will have secured what he wants; that was all he was after; now do not permit yourself to be any longer the tool of the man who has slandered me; do you on your side give up this candidacy, which is not at all in your line."

If grandfather was surprised by this change of tactics, he did not show it in the least.

"Oh, it would be a great mistake for you to retire. You would perhaps have been elected, and as for me, it's all one. My principal object is to dis-

avow your political opinions. The family can't command our ideas."

Father seemed to hesitate a moment as to resuming the subject before deciding to let it go. He let it go because there was another matter even nearer to his heart.

"Let us say no more about it," he said. "Something of far greater importance has been going on in my house, something that I can not tolerate. You have robbed me of this child whom I entrusted to you."

The conflict was suddenly taking another form, and I had become its object. In a flash arose before me the scene when I was setting out for my first walk after my convalescence. We were all three upon the doorstep. Father was putting my hand into grandfather's with the bewildering words, *Here is my son — it is the future of the house.* And grandfather answered with his little laugh, *Don't worry, Michel, no one will rob you of him.* What did they mean? How could any one rob him of me?

"How absurd!" grandfather was saying. "I never robbed any one of anything. So I am accused of stealing children, am I? Why not of eating them?"

Mockery and irony were, however, too weak a weapon not to be broken in the attack that followed. Not one detail of that scene has faded from my memory. I can see them both, one strong and high-col-

oured, in the fulness of strength and vigour, and yet uttering such a groan as trees give forth under the woodman's axe, the other so old, fragile and shrivelled, and yet all insolence, holding up his head and jeering, and I between the two like the stake in a game they were playing.

"Yes," father replied; "I gave you my son to make him well, not to lead him astray. You yourself promised to do nothing which might one day put him in opposition to our household and religious traditions. Have you kept your promise? I have for some time been doubtful as to what was going on in this little head. I spoke to Valentine about it, and learned that she too was fearful of this misfortune, though in her respect for you she dreaded to make the mistake of attributing an unfortunate influence to you. I do not know how you have managed to take possession of the child's mind. But I can not but know that you have been taking Francis to the very place where our opponents are in the habit of meeting, and where they take advantage of your weakness and your generosity."

"I can't permit you—" grandfather tried to interrupt.

"Of your generosity," the voice went on more firmly, "or of mine. This morning I received a bill from that place. It is a large one. Martinod no doubt thinks it a joke to treat his heelers at my expense."

"Who sent you the bill?"

"The proprietor of the café. To whom should he send it? He brought it himself, and by way of argument he simply said, 'The boy had some of it.' My son was a partaker as well as my father; I am responsible, since, for my part, I believe in the solidarity of the family. I paid for Casenave, whose body bears already the promise of a drunkard's death; for Gallus and Merinos, poor wretches, incapable of the slightest work; for that idle Galurin and that scoundrel Martinod. Paying is of no consequence — I have been through worse than that, as you know. But what errors have you taught this child? I must know all, now, that I may uproot them from his heart like weeds from the garden. Where is he going? What will he make of his life with that utopia of liberty to which every hour of real life gives the lie — without the stern discipline of home, without our faith? Don't you know that what maintains our race, every race, is the spirit of the family? Has not life taught you that?"

I was moved by the tone in which he spoke. Always sensitive to the melody of words, I caught them as they were uttered, and by them I can now easily rise to the ideas which they expressed but which then passed over my head.

"Have you finished?" asked grandfather, with an impertinence that moved me to admiration.

"Yes, I have finished. I beg pardon for having

raised my voice in the presence of this child. He should at least know — you can bear witness to that — that I have always been a respectful son."

"Oh, you have paid my debts. And you are still paying them."

"Is that all? And have you not at all times had the support of my filial affection?"

"Of your protection."

"My protection is extended only to shield you from those who desire your ruin. And can't you understand that in withdrawing this child from my authority, disarming him for future conflicts, you are preparing the way for the ruin of us all?"

Grandfather exclaimed, "Oh! oh!"— and went on in his turn:

"I should like to know what you are blaming me for. I took the boy to walk when he needed it, and instilled into him the love of nature."

"And not the love of his home."

"Is it my fault that he prefers my society? I never try to teach, for my part — I don't go about preaching at all times and seasons subordination, tradition, the principles of religion. I simply have respect for life, for liberty if you prefer the word."

"But liberty is not life. It destroys everything that should be preserved."

"Oh, don't let us go over that discussion. What has happened to your son happened to mine."

"To me?"

"Yes, to you. When you were little another in-

fluence was substituted for mine. The magistrate, the nurseryman, the lover of roses —"

"Your father."

"Yes; he gave you a taste for trimmed trees, raked alleys, for laws, human and divine, and what more!"

"Why do you lay it up against me that I am like all our race?"

"I saw you changing under my very eyes. Do you know whether I too did not suffer to see it?"

"Oh, you were always so detached from me, and from —"

My father did not finish his sentence, and I shall not finish it now, though I am only too fearful of having discovered its meaning. The respect which he then maintained lays its command upon me, even at this distance. They had both laid bare a hidden wound, which had never quite ceased to bleed. They stood there face to face with that memory between them, terrified perhaps with what they were discovering in the past, not wishing to go farther before me, when an unexpected relief arrived.

Mother came in. She had probably heard their voices from her room and had hastened, all a-tremble, to prevent the conflict going farther. With her came the household peace.

"What is the matter?" she asked gently.

Her mere presence had parted them, and it was impressed upon me that the conversation would have no further interest for any one.

"I am here to claim my son," said father.

"Take him, take him," said grandfather, abandoning me to my fate. But he could not refrain from adding, defiantly:

"Take him back if you can."

"He ought not to be parted from God," said my mother simply, remembering the time I had failed to come to Mass. Then, feeling that this was not the place for me, she pushed me toward them, as a token of reconciliation, with the words:

"Kiss them, and go down to Aunt Deen."

I obeyed, and after being negligently or reluctantly kissed I rushed down stairs, not caring how the peace was made, thinking only of Nazzarena who was going away. A little later I heard some one in the garden calling me, but I did not answer.

I flew to the chestnut grove on the edge of the domain, and scrambled upon the wall, near the breach that one of the trees had once made merely by the push of its roots, and which had been closed by a grating. From this point I could see the road to Italy. Only one chance was left to me — would the circus troop go that way? I waited long, but not in vain.

They are coming, they are coming! First the waggons carrying the tent, the benches, and all the accessories. What wretched horses were drawing them! I looked about for Nazzarena's black courser, but he was not to be distinguished from the rest of the sorry jades. Then came the *roulottes* that the

folk lived in. Smoke was rising from one or another of the slender chimneys. They were getting dinner ready for the long journey. On one of the rear balconies an old woman was combing a little girl's hair, the well known parroquet beside them. I was looking, with all my eyes I was looking, for the blond hair of my beloved.

Ah, I saw her at last! It was she, there, bare-headed — her clear-cut face and golden tint. She was herself driving one of the waggons. A mission of importance had been entrusted to her. She held her whip upright in the air, but she loved animals too much to strike them. She was sitting very straight, holding her head proudly — how lovely were the lines of her throat! Why had I never noticed that before? I had never really seen her, so to speak — I must see her, I must see her!

When she emerged from the shadow of the chestnuts the sun made a golden nimbus through her curly hair, that seemed to blend with the light, so that one could not tell where her curls began or the light ended. Beside her on the seat sat a little boy. They were talking to one another, laughing together. I saw her white teeth, but her glance, her golden glance, would she not turn it toward me? Nazzarena, Nazzarena, don't you feel that I am here, so close to you, perched upon the wall, this wall just above you?

She laughed, she was passing, she had passed. Now the roof of the *roulotte* hid her. I had not called

her, she had not looked at me. Was it possible that I no longer saw her face, nor her eyes, nor her golden colour? Is it possible that so tremendous a thing lasted only a tiny little minute?

My heart was bursting in my breast, and I sat there motionless. Why did I not leap from the wall to the road? Why did I not run after her? Was I nailed to my place? Now I knew that she was lost to me; now I knew that she was always lost to me. Like the shepherd leading his flock to the mountain, whose chance word taught me to know desire, so she, only by going away, taught me the pain of love-partings.

The pain of love-partings is fixed for me in that picture, a little boy astride of the wall of his ancestral home, and a little girl who in the morning light goes away along the road, goes away without turning her head. . . .

How fast we hold to our memories! Long after, when I had become the master, the farmer came to ask permission to cut down that tree which had covered her with its shadow that last time. "Monsieur," he urged, "the leaves are rusty, it is all rotten inside, it bears no more fruit, it is losing value every day, and before long it won't bring anything." I resisted his entreaties, alleging vague reasons. How make an honest farmer understand that one would preserve a dead chestnut tree merely because a little gipsy passed under it, so many years ago that

one dares not count them? If there are inexplicable things, this surely is one.

My man wouldn't give up. "Monsieur, Monsieur, one of these fine days it will fall and break down the wall." I opine that a wall may be replaced. "Monsieur, Monsieur, one of these fine days it will crush some one passing by." Come, that's more serious. A passer-by can't be made over again. Oh, well, let's be reasonable. If it falls, it will crush nothing but my heart.

I gave the order to cut down the witness of my first love sorrow. I leaned over the hole which its torn-up roots left in the earth, and was not surprised that it occupied so much room. Now the newly-built wall has closed up the breach, and I feel myself more than ever shut up within my property. As one advances in life, it seems that the surrounding walls draw in.

Nature changes before we do. Nature dies before we do. Little by little we lose all that gave the past its character. Nothing is left to bear witness to the truth of our memories. Little by little other shadows than those of trees descend upon us. And it is hard to believe that one has been — as perhaps every one was once — a boy astride of a wall, not knowing whether he will jump over, to the free life, to the young girl who is laughing, to love, or whether he will go back, like a good boy, to The House. . . .

VI

A WALK WITH FATHER

During my long convalescence, as I was not permitted to read all the time, I had constructed, with the aid of Aunt Deen, who used patiently to put on her glasses, which she was not fond of wearing, in order to be more accurate in the use of her big scissors, which sometimes gave an unlucky slip in the cardboard — all sorts of edifices, châteaux, farmhouses, cottages, and even cathedrals. I used to set them up on a great table which had been appropriated to me. The whole represented to my mind a town which my lead soldiers were to besiege. These soldiers, some of them a legacy from my brother Bernard, who even as a small child had begun to make a collection of uniforms, others which had been brought to me some Christmas Eve by the war-like Little Jesus, were innumerable; there were whole regiments of them, large and tiny, thin and plump, infantry, cavalry and artillery. Among the cavalry some were of one piece with their horses, others were detachable, a sharp pointed appendix in their rear permitting them to be fixed at will upon the perforated backs of their horses. One evening there was

a tragic assault. The detached general (he was one of those provided with an appendix) had been the first to enter the breach, after which he remounted his chestnut charger, which had been by I know not what subterfuge hoisted into the interior. In the excitement of victory I set fire to the four corners of the conquered city, and when I sought to check its ravages it was too late. In another minute the fire had consumed everything, and all those houses that had cost me so many weeks' work, and upon which I had so prided myself, were only a heap of black ashes. I was severely reprimanded for having so nearly burned the furniture, and yet I just sat there in stupefied amazement at the rapidity of the burning, compared with the time it had taken me to build.

The abrupt end of my first love affair, that poor little minute in which it was given me to see Nazzarena in the sunlight — caused me a like amazement, a like discouragement. Day after day I had been building up within myself my love story, so vague at first and then so rich and serious, continually adding something to it — a smile, a word, a meeting, and even a bit of scoffing on her part; now it was admiration for her feats of horsewomanship — now that I had merely passed through the Market Square and seen her *roulotte*. She had filled a larger place in my life than I suspected, and now nothing more happened. This void, so new to me, was harder to bear than real pain. Unavailingly I tried to shake it off, for I could not as yet imagine how

much of comfort one may have remembering things. How should I have known that it is possible to live outside of the present moment? All that was left to me of Nazzarena gone, Nazzarena forever lost, it was less the thought of her than an all pervading lassitude caused by her absence — a lassitude which was dear to me, in which I seemed to find her again, and which made me incapable of taking an interest in anything whatever.

This condition of mind prevented my paying much attention to the changes which were taking place at our house. I accommodated myself to them without effort and every one spoke of my yielding disposition. Since the tower scene a certain embarrassment had existed between my father and my grandfather, which only my mother's tact rendered endurable to either. Though I had not been formally forbidden, I ceased to walk out with grandfather or even to go to his room. He would shut himself up a good part of the day to play on his violin. When we assembled at table he made no attempt to come near me,— it was as if he had entirely given up our intimacy. That seemed to me somewhat ungrateful, in view of the important part I had taken in defending him. Meal times became stupid. One held aloof, another was absorbed in thought. I understood that both of them, by a tacit understanding, had retired from the municipal campaign. No one dared to speak of the elections, which were close at hand, but the notices posted on the walls

which I read on the way to school, told me how things were. Martinod's name appeared, and even Galurin's, but Pour-the-drink and the two artists had been left out. Aunt Deen talked to herself on the staircase of extraordinary events and horrible traitors. In the end Martinod had accomplished his purpose: the candidate whom he dreaded, the only one he dreaded, had refused to run.

I also understood that grandfather had not gone again to the Café of the Navigators, either by way of observing the truce, or to avoid entreaties to which he would doubtless have been inclined to yield. When he heard that father had been called to the bedside of Casenave, who was delirious, he seemed surprised and even moved; he had therefore not seen that old companion.

"Casenave ill!" he exclaimed. "He must have drunk too much."

At luncheon father announced to us that Casenave was dead.

"I warned him," he said. "He ought to have given up the bottle long ago."

"He chose for himself," said grandfather.

He chose for himself! That was enough to excuse and justify all actions, good or bad, and so I understood it. I saw a reply spring to my father's lips, but he repressed it, and merely added:

"I have warned Tem Bossette. He will come to the same end, if he does not take care. It is already pretty late for him."

"All of them drunkards," summed up Aunt Deen, who liked to deal in generalities.

Election Sunday came at last. I knew it by the multicoloured posters which decorated the fronts of buildings and the greater affluence of those that I had to wade through on the way to the School Mass. At the house no one had made the slightest allusion to it. After the spiritless luncheon grandfather put on his hat and grasped his cane.

"Where are you going?" asked Aunt Deen.

"Into the country."

"You have voted already?"

"Indeed I have not."

"It's a duty."

"That's all the same to me."

"After all, so much the better," my aunt added; "you would have been capable of voting for those scoundrels."

She deemed it useless to designate them more definitely.

He had almost "solicited the suffrages of voters," to quote from the posters, and he didn't even vote. He chose for himself and I could see no reason to object. Every one had a right to do as he chose and to change as he fancied,— otherwise what would become of liberty? As he was going out he suddenly turned to me and proposed that I should go with him.

"Just let me get my cap," I cried, starting up, as if I had totally forgotten the scene in the tower.

Father, who was observing us, checked my enthusiasm by saying:

"Thank you. To-day I will take him for a walk. I am at leisure."

He very seldom allowed himself leisure. His patients were more and more absorbing him. His reputation must have extended far and wide, for he was sent for from great distances; his absences, his journeys multiplied.

"I am no longer my own master," he said to mother. "And life is passing."

"My dear," she murmured. "I beg of you don't overtire yourself so."

She was always devising ways of caring for him, of finding means for him to rest. To reassure her he would laugh, drawing himself up to full height, rounding out his chest. He never needed rest. His robust shoulders might have borne up the world; and in fact did he not carry the burden of the house and of our seven futures? By a strange complication of feeling, though inwardly I was always in a state of revolt against him, I never ceased to admire him. I could not imagine him beaten, or complaining. Life was for him one perpetual victory.

I admired him only at a distance. The prospect of this walk with him appalled me, and I remained on the stairs, waiting for some unknown event to interpose an obstacle.

"Come," he said encouragingly, "run get your

cap — make haste. The days are long — we can take a good walk."

There was no harshness in his sonorous voice, but rather that encouraging tone that always brought hope to his patients. In fact, neither when he took me home from the Café of the Navigators, nor in the tower chamber, had he treated me harshly. But his kindness had no softening effect upon me. I was not in the least grateful for it, but still considered him as a ruthless tyrant bent upon keeping me in fetters. As soon as he appeared I ceased to be free. Had he taken me to the wildest, most desolate place in the world, I should still have seen walls rising up around me. With grandfather it always seemed to me as if all enclosures disappeared, and the enfranchised earth belonged to every one — or to no one.

Why did my father impose upon me this long walk with him, the mere prospect of which chilled me? Hadn't Martinod's revelations showed me what his preferences were? He was proud of Bernard and Stephen, he was always thinking of Mélanie. I had sometimes seen him looking at her with a strange earnestness, as if he had never seen her before, or as if he were imprinting her upon his memory; as for me, I didn't count. With all the power of my will I was determined to be a misunderstood son, an unhappy, unjustly neglected child. It was necessary that I should play this rôle, to keep alive the love-sadness in which I found my chief pleasure.

Therefore I set out reluctantly, and let him see that I did. He on the contrary made every effort to be gay. Perceiving that he desired to put me at my ease, I became all the more reserved, in a spirit of opposition.

We were off at last, not with the slow pace of idlers who have no particular point in view, as grandfather and I were in the habit of walking, but with a light, quick step as if to military music.

"If we walk fast," he said, "we can do it in two or three hours."

Desiring him to understand that I was not in the least interested in the walk, I did not inquire where we were going. It would surely not be that secluded place where the ferns grew thick, where furze clung to the rocks, where, apart from the rest of the world, far from houses and cultivated fields, I had been introduced to wild nature by the soft music of a cascade.

I remember that as we were passing through a village I gave a great kick to a fragment of an old drain tile that lay in the road. In an instant all the dogs were howling at our heels. Somewhat terrified by their wide open mouths and the great hubbub that I had aroused, I drew near to my companion.

"Let them bark," he said reassuringly. "You will see that it is just so in life. As soon as one makes a little noise in the world all the dogs rush upon you. If you turn against them you make your-

self ridiculous. The best way is to take no notice, and just let the dogs bark."

Somehow I knew that he was thinking of Martinod and the slap he had given him. As soon as we were beyond reach of the dogs I was vexed with my father for having noticed my movement of fear.

We began to climb a hill by a good mule path. By degrees as we went up into a purer air, he recovered his fine spirits. It was a lovely day in late May or early June, warm but with a good breeze. Spring comes slowly in my country, and vegetation starts suddenly into life. It might have begun the day before, or the day before that, so bright were the leaves, so rich the grass, so gay the flowers. We crossed a grove of oaks, beeches and birches; the ruddy brown oaks formed the pillars of an immense vaulted temple, hiding the sky.

"Ah," said father, pausing for breath, and taking off his hat, the better to feel the coolness that fell from the trees, "how good it is to be here, and what a beautiful day!"

I wondered at his raptures over so common a thing, which I had so often enjoyed, not considering how seldom he had an opportunity for such enjoyment. But he went on:

"It is terrible to be so busy! Not to have time to enjoy the sunshine and the wide spaces, nor to talk with one's sons as often as one would wish. Do you remember the old times, Francis, when I used

to tell you about the wars in the Iliad and the return to Ithaca?"

I had not forgotten, but those epic stories seemed to me to belong to a far-away and outgrown childhood. They dated from before that convalescence which had changed my heart. They dated from before my walks with grandfather, from before liberty and Nazzarena, from before love. So I cared for them no longer. Hector had fought to guard his home, and Ulysses had braved tempests to return to his, the smoke from which he had seen afar, from the sea; but I was looking forward to my individual future, when I should not be dependent upon any person or anything.

We soon made our way through the cover of the trees and reached the top of the hill. It was crowned by the ruins of an ancient fortress, which, to judge by the broken and crumbling fragments of walls, and by the height of the still upright and loop-holed towers, must have been of considerable extent. Brambles and ivy were growing among the ruins, which seemed to be standing out against the last assault, that of vegetable growth, greedy to overwhelm them.

"I do not care much for ruins," observed my father. "They are poetic, but they weaken the desire for action. They remind us of the end of things, and the object of life is to build up. Still, they have their part to play, evoking the memory of

a past of conflict and glory. This was once the fortified château of Malpas. It commanded the road to the frontier. What attacks and sieges it has endured! In 1814, when France was assailed by three armies, though it was then entirely dismantled, cannon were set upon the walls to resist the Austrians."

I might have known that we were going there. The place is celebrated through the entire province. For what it was celebrated I only vaguely knew. Grandfather had never taken me there; he detested places that every one visited, "where," he used to say, "whole families go on Sundays, places full of memories, great men, battles and greasy papers."

Father grew animated when he talked of battles. Had not he too defended the house against our enemies, against Aunt Deen's *they*, so fiercely bent upon its overthrow? Won to him for a moment, I had almost asked, "And where were you during the war, father?" I knew that he had entered the army and braved the snow with his company during a bitter winter. But the question did not pass my lips. To have asked it would have been to own that I was yielding to his influence, and I braced myself to resist him. I would have given all this forest of oaks, birches and beeches, all those ruins, so picturesque against the sky-line, for the chestnut tree under which Nazzarena had passed.

He led me to the edge of the terrace that had once been the court of the château, the wall of which had been thrown down. From here one dominated the

whole country; there was the lake with its indented shores, its graceful little gulfs, its green promontories, the town rising in terraces above it, easy to trace by its open squares and public gardens; there were the villages of the plain, half hidden in greenery, like flocks of sheep at rest, those on the hillsides grouped around their sentry-like churches; and closing in the view, the mountains, here clothed with forests, there rocky and bare. The pure afternoon light, shimmering over all, sharpened their outlines. Here and there a slate roof reflected back its arrows of gold. The various crops could be distinguished by their different colours, by the various shades of green, and all the boundaries of the indefinitely divided properties, hedges, walls or fences, and the little white cemeteries with their square plots, near the groups of houses, stood out clear.

Father named over all the inhabited places, and then the hills and valleys. His way was not in the least like grandfather's. Where grandfather and I would have looked for such traces of nature as we could find still surviving in its pristine simplicity between the havoc wrought by plough and axe, the changes brought about by agricultural toil, he, on the contrary, was pointing out the constant intervention of man, the results of the toil of generations. Instead of the free earth, it was the earth disciplined, constrained to serve, obey, produce,—the earth that in the past had been watered by blood, traversed by armed troops, protected by force

against the foreigner, as was meet for a frontier province of France, blessed by prayer. For a very saint, a popular saint who had brought miracles into everyday life, our Saint François de Sales had knelt upon this earth and offered it to God. It was feeding the living; it was giving repose to the dead.

Glorious, fruitful, sacred earth, the eulogy of its threefold greatness fell from his lips with such lucidity that in spite of myself I was moved with him.

"And the house," he concluded, "don't you see the house?"

I looked for it without interest, realising that I had lost the habit of looking in that direction. It was, however, easy enough to discover, on the edge of the town, standing alone, and at its back the lovely rural domain by which it joined the country.

Like the spirals of a soaring bird, father's words had covered the entire country, and now, drawing in its circles, had suddenly dropped down upon our roof. He went on to describe the house in detail, as one describes the features of a countenance.

It had not all been built at one time. At first there was only the ground floor.

"You have seen the date on the tablet in the kitchen chimney — 1610."

"Or 1670," I thought to myself, almost repeating, like grandfather, whose reflection recurred to my mind: "It's a matter of no importance." But I dared not risk this comment openly.

A century later our ancestors, having improved

their fortunes, had added a story and built the tower. Limited in one direction by the town, the property had been extended toward the plain, then covered by woods. Trees had been cut down to make room for the garden, for fields and meadows. It had been a constant and oft repeated struggle against difficulties, against mischance and against other foes. Did father, then, believe in Aunt Deen's *they?* I had almost smiled, but he did not give me time. Each generation had brought its effort to the common task, and one or another — that of the garde-français, that of the grenadier,— its contribution of honour; the chain had not been broken.

I felt a strong desire to object —"How about grandfather?" What would he have said to that?

He answered without my question, with no bitterness in his voice, when he went on. Sometimes the chain had been stretched almost to the breaking point, and the house had seen bad days. He pictured it ploughing the waves like a strong ship that has an unerring pilot at the helm. His voice, which in the old days had so joyfully related the exploits of heroes, seemed now to rise, with growing exaltation, into a sort of hymn to the house. It was the poem of the land, the race, the family, it was the history of our realm, our dynasty.

Through the years that have fled since then, the memory of that day, far from weakening, has grown more full of meaning to my eyes. My father had measured the length of the road which I had followed

in separating myself from him, and was endeavouring to recall me, to overtake me, to attach me to himself again. Before resorting to authority he was trying to kindle my imagination, awaken my heart, free them from chimeras and set before them an object capable of moving them. Only, hemmed in on all sides as he was by the pressure of daily duty, he had felt the need of haste, he had only this one day, a part of which was already gone, only a few fleeting hours in which to effect my transformation. He was hoping to regain his lost son by a single effort, counting upon his incomparable art of winning men, of subduing them to himself.

Now, so late, I realise that all he was saying to convince me, to awaken in me an emotion which should free me from my bonds, must have been as noble as a Homeric song. Even then I had some inward intuition of it. I do not know if ever more eloquent words were uttered than those he spoke to me upon that hilltop, while evening was slowly beginning to paint the sky and breathe peace upon the earth. I can find no other words to express it,— he was paying court to me like a lover who feels that he is not loved, who yet knows that his love alone can bestow happiness. The affection of a father descends, calls to ours to rise to it; but his, by a unique privilege which in no sense lowered its pride, rose to me, enveloped me, implored me.

Yes, I really believe that my father was implor-

ing me, and I remained apparently unmoved while I should have interrupted him with a cry in which my whole being was outpoured. Yet I was not in fact unmoved. There was too much pathos in the tone of his voice not to thrill through my early awakened sensibility. But by a singular inconsistency, that in me which was moved by his voice was precisely the very desire, all the desires, that he was trying to eradicate from my heart. That voice was chanting the stones of the house that had been built to triumph over time, the shelter of the roof, the unity of the family, the strength of the race which maintains itself upon the soil, the peace of the dead whom God has in his keeping. And while this canticle was thus making melody I was distinctly hearing another, sung for me alone by the music of the vagabond wind, the immensity of unknown spaces, the words of the shepherd on his way to the mountain; the apple blossoms showered upon my face the first day of my love, and Nazzarena's laugh, and the hopeless shadow of the chestnut tree under which she had passed.

For one moment my father thought that he had conquered. His piercing eyes, always studying me, discerned my emotion. An impulse of sincerity moved me to turn away without speaking, and he understood that I was far from him. His voice ceased. Surprised by the sudden silence I looked at him in my turn, and I saw sadness sweeping over him like

a shadow, that heart-breaking shadow that rises from the hollows of the valleys and slowly climbs the mountains as night draws on.

. . . Father, now I can interpret your sadness. Alone I have once more made the pilgrimage of Malpas, and alone there, I could understand you better. You were thinking of your two elder sons, who, burning with sacrifice, would soon be far away, for the service of God and of the fatherland. You were thinking of your dear Mélanie, who, drawn by the severe serenity of the cloister, was awaiting the hour of her majority. The main branches of the tree of life that you had planted were detaching themselves from the trunk. You had been counting upon me to continue your work and I was escaping you. By yourself alone you had sustained the tottering house, and the house, overwhelming you with labours and cares, was separating your own from you. It is the penalty of material necessities,— they do not leave time enough for the guardianship of souls. But you were thinking of triumphing over time by the mere power of your virile love for me, and your eloquence. In one walk, one conversation, you had hoped to regain the ground you had lost, without violating the respect due to your father. The heart of a child of fourteen years is an obscure heart, especially when love has entered it too soon. I did feel the importance of what you were teaching me, and yet I was considering how to shake it off. The less

clearly I understood the word liberty, the more it fascinated and drew me. All the music to which I was listening was the music that it made. . . .

My father's disappointment found expression in a gesture. Grieved at his inability to win me he suddenly seized me by the two arms as if to lift me from the ground, and prove that he possessed me.

"Oh, understand me, poor child," he exclaimed. "You must indeed understand me. Your whole future depends upon it."

"Father, you hurt," was my only reply.

I lied, for his grasp had merely surprised me. He tried to make light of it.

"Oh, come, that's not true! I didn't hurt you in the least."

"Yes, you did," I insisted with temper.

He replied kindly, almost apologetically, "I did not mean to."

Ah, I might well be proud of myself! That strength which I dreaded had entreated instead of breaking me: it had not conquered me.

He laid his hand on my head, no doubt to clear my mind of any mistaken interpretation of his former act, and though he did not lean hard upon it, I felt it heavy upon me. A few years earlier, grandfather, by the same imposition of hands, had invested me with the ownership of all nature.

"Let us go back," said my father. "Let us go back to the house."

He said "the house," like me. Until then the expression had been too familiar to make an impression. This time it did impress me.

On the homeward way we heard the detonations of small cannon, fired in honour of the elections.

"So soon!" he said. "The Martinod list is elected."

The frustration of his public hopes had followed hard upon his paternal disappointment. For a moment he bowed his head, but it was only for a moment.

The church bell of a neighbouring village rang the Angelus. Another replied, and then another, breathing over all the countryside the serenity of evening and of prayer.

My father stood still to listen, and he smiled. Through this peaceful reminder of the Annunciation God was speaking to him, and through it he regained composure.

"Let's walk fast," he said, "your mother may be anxious over our delay."

I was thinking within myself: "One of these days I shall go away. One of these days I shall be my own master, like grandfather."

VII

THE FIRST DEPARTURE

A FEW days after this disappointing walk — perhaps even the next day — I went to my mother's room to get a forgotten school book. I was already turning the latch of the door when I heard two voices. One, my mother's, was familiar to my ear, but its tones were almost new to me, by reason of the firmness now mingled with its habitual gentleness; when we were little she had sometimes spoken to us in that tone to require more attention and earnestness in our little duties, or our lessons. As for the other, it must have been that of a stranger, even of some one asking for alms, for it came to my ear hushed, veiled, melancholy. What visitor was this whom my mother received in her room and not in the drawing-room? I dared neither go in nor let go of the latch, lest in falling it should betray my presence. Rooted to the spot, at once by timidity and curiosity, I listened to the dialogue going on within.

"I am sure you are mistaken," my mother was saying. "The child is going through a crisis, but he is not different from his brothers and sisters; he is not estranged from us."

"The chasm is deeper than you think, Valentine," replied the other voice. "I feel that I am losing him. If you had seen him at Malpas, how inflexible he was, how he resisted my exhortations, almost my entreaties."

"He is only a child."

"Too mature a child. I can not yet be sure what it is that estranges him from us, but I shall find out. Ah, poor dear, there is no use in trying to reassure me; three years ago my father completed his cure by keeping him out of doors, but he did not give back to us the same child that we had entrusted to him: he has changed his heart, and it is in childhood that the heart is formed. This child is no longer ours."

This child is no longer ours. The statement lifted me up with a sort of vanity. I belonged to no one. I was free. That liberty which grandfather had not been able to command, even in the blood of the days of June, had all of a sudden become mine!

I had recognised my father's voice, and my parents were talking of me. But why had they so interchanged their attitudes that I had not at first recognised them? I had always supposed that they could not change. Mother was always anxious about nothing at all — when the wind blew or the thunder growled, even far away, she never failed to light the blessed candle; or her shadow behind her chamber window told us that she was watching for the return

of the absent ones. She was never wholly at peace, unless we were all grouped around her, except, indeed, when praying, for she lived very near to God. It sometimes happened that father would laugh at her for her endless anxieties. During my illness, and longer ago, when the house had been put up for sale, it was he, always he, who kept up her woman's courage, who assured her of the future, reminded her of the constant protection of Providence. I had never imagined them otherwise, and now behold they had changed parts,— it was mother who was uplifting father in his discouragement.

I should have been disgusted with myself if I had listened at doors. Urged by self-esteem, mingled with a sense of honour, I should not have hesitated to enter the room but for the next words, which were uttered by my father, and which nailed me to the spot, the latch still in my hand, powerless to go in or to draw back, so greatly was I impressed and captivated.

"The same thing took place between him and me that long ago took place between me and my father — the same family tragedy."

"Oh, Michel, what do you mean?"

"Yes, my father was right when he recalled it the day that I found Francis in his room, the day when Francis took his part against me — unhappy child! When I was little, I, too, had felt the influence of my grandfather. Only it was exercised in the other direction. He had been president of the Chamber

at the Court. Returning home at the age of retirement, he amused himself with cultivating the garden. It was he who planted the rose-garden. He taught me the importance, the beauty, yes, the beauty of the order to which man may subject not only himself, but nature. Perhaps it is to him that I owe it that I have been able to direct my life, to dominate it. But my father, who was interested only in his music and his utopias, used to laugh at us. 'He will turn that child into a geometrician,' he used to say. It is he who has turned my child into a rebel."

He added, bitterly, "A father, in his own house, should never yield his own authority to any one. To withdraw Francis from that influence which has gained the upper hand of mine, I should not hesitate even to send him to boarding school. It would only be anticipating by a year or two the method we adopted for the older children. And in fact our school is hardly advanced enough for him now."

"It would be one more expense," objected mother.

"Money is a small thing compared with education."

Thus I learned that they were proposing to arrange my future without consulting me! Boarding school — prison — was to punish me for my independence. For the moment I was crushed,— then, in my pride I refused to admit that I was crushed. Would not that be to admit the attractions of the house? Since they were considering the possi-

bility of sending me away I would get ahead of them, and would myself ask to go. Yes, that should be the punishment I would inflict upon my parents. Upon my parents only?

But I could not remain there at the door and be surprised — and besides, I was ashamed! I therefore finally turned the latch and went in. I went in like an important personage, steeling myself against the emotion which was getting the better of me.

"I have come for my book," said I, by way of justifying my entrance.

Father and mother, sitting opposite one another, looked at me and then exchanged a glance. I found my book — which a careful hand had put in order upon the table, seized it hastily and turned to go.

"Francis," said my mother.

I turned to her with an expressionless face, put on to keep back the tears.

"Listen, my child," she said,— and when she called me "child" I drew myself up —"you must always obey your father."

Obey! the word was odious to me. "Why, I always listen to him," I said.

Father fixed me with his piercing eyes that hurt as if I felt the points of their rays. He seemed to hesitate; no doubt he did hesitate between his desire to explain and the sense of its uselessness. Recovering his natural — and by that very fact, authoritative — voice, he simply gave me a proof of confidence.

"We were talking of you just now," he said.

"Yes, of you," repeated mother, somewhat anxiously.

Then came a sort of interrogatory:

"What do you think of being when you are grown?" asked father. "You think about it sometimes, don't you? What sort of life would you prefer? You have your own tastes and preferences. Have you chosen your vocation, like your brothers?"

My vocation! Just what I expected! Vocations were often talked about at our house, and how every one ought faithfully to fulfil his own. During my illness, and in the early days of my convalescence, before my walks with grandfather, I had often thought, and even announced, that when I was grown up I would be a doctor, too. I could not imagine a finer career. I had talked in the kitchen with the peasants who came for the doctor, their faces all drawn with pain, and on the staircase I had met the train of patients who came for consultation with dolorous faces, and went away cheered. Though I had ceased to talk about it it was understood at our house that I was to be my father's successor.

"I don't know," I replied, turning away.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, in a surprised and disappointed tone. "I thought you wanted to be a doctor."

"Oh, no!" I replied, suddenly making up my mind in a spirit of opposition.

He said nothing more of this hope which had been dear to him, but went on:

"Oh, well, you have plenty of time to choose. Lawyer, perhaps? There are noble causes to defend. Or architect? Building houses, restoring old ones, constructing schools and churches — we have no good architects about here; there is a vacancy for one."

Thus by turns he extolled the various professions which might keep me in my native town. As he spoke the dastardly thought came to me of separating myself entirely from the house, of achieving the conquest of my own liberty. I sought about in my mind for a calling which would oblige me to leave home. In our part of the country there were no mines nor any metallurgical establishments.

"I want to be an engineer," I said.

I had but just made the discovery, and knew but vaguely the nature of the profession. There had been some talk about it in the family for Stephen.

"Really?" said my father, without pursuing the subject. "We will talk about it another time."

"Only," I said, hanging my head and averting my eyes, somewhat surprised to find how one thing followed another, "only I should need another preparation than that of this school."

"Your school isn't sufficient?"

"Oh, the teachers are good fellows," I replied contemptuously, "but as for lessons, they are far from brilliant."

Father said "ah!" and was silent. Raising my eyes I saw how surprised he was, and that was as joyful to me as a victory. Perhaps there was also in his countenance another expression than one of surprise. I was giving him an opportunity to get rid of me, as I was pleased to think was his wish; why did he not make the most of it? He turned to mother, who seemed grieved.

"This requires reflection," he said.

How could one, at such an early age, find pleasure in tormenting those who loved him? Perhaps the picture in my Bible representing the return of the Prodigal Son had taught me the inexhaustible resources of paternal love. My father seemed to me so strong that I could have no fear of hurting him. All through life it is those upon whom one most depends whom one uses and misuses without mercy, not so much as thinking that they may be weary, since they never complain. And counting on their energy and health one always persuades oneself that there will be plenty of time to make it up to them, in case of need.

And yet I had discerned my father's sorrow as I stood at the door, and the altered tone of his voice had revealed to me its depth. I am asking myself now if that very confession of sorrow, far from touching me did not lessen him in my eyes, accustomed as I had been to consider him an invincible hero — whether it did not change for me that pic-

ture of him which he had imprinted upon me from my earliest intelligence.

The long vacation did not bring its usual gaiety and diversions, that year. Mélanie's departure for the convent, and that of Stephen, young as he was, for the Seminary had been finally decided upon. They were merely waiting for the month of October; then father would take his daughter to Paris and at the same time would place me in the school where my two elder brothers had finished their preparatory studies — for I had gained my point — and mother would go to Lyons with Stephen. This knowledge cast over our games and our gatherings a shade of sadness, which those concerned tried in vain to clear away. Aunt Deen, who was growing a little heavier, climbed the stairs more slowly, blew her nose noisily, prayed very loud and with a certain impetuosity which must have shaken the saints in Paradise, and murmured *Thy will be done* in a tone that could hardly pass for one of submission. Grandfather shut himself up in his tower, playing his violin with hands that trembled, adding other notes than those of the score, went out for his walk at nightfall without a word to any one, and seemed to be living in ignorance and indifference concerning all that was going on in the family. When he met me he would simply make the remark, accompanied with his little laugh,

"Ah, there you are!" while he never spoke to either of my brothers or sisters as he passed them. But his laugh did not ring true; my ear was quick to perceive that our separation weighed upon him. I would gladly have rushed to him if he had not had an air of thinking lightly of all the vexations in the world. The shadow of my father was always between us. I had had no orders to avoid him; our alienation was by tacit consent. We had never dared to confess to any complicity. One day, however, he added:

"So, you are going to Paris?"

"Yes, grandfather, when schools open."

"You are in luck. One feels more free in Paris than anywhere else. You will see."

Was he jesting again? For me Paris meant boarding school, prison. And besides, had he not often told me that large cities are baneful, that real happiness was to be found only in the fields? But grandfather cared little enough for logic.

My approaching departure — that departure which I had proudly demanded, and which inspired within me a secret repulsion against which I hardened myself, made but small stir in the house — a fact that greatly irritated my self-love — being lost in that of Mélanie and my brothers, as a small boat is lost in the wake of a great vessel. Bernard, who had graduated from Saint-Cyr with a high grade that put him in the marine infantry, would go to Toulon, whence he would shortly embark for Ton-

kin. Now his first word, on his return home had been — I heard him say it to Aunt Deen, who had hastened, breathless, to open the door,

"You can't imagine the pleasure with which I ring this bell."

Then why did he ask to go to China? Mélanie and Stephen, too, exchanged mystifying confidences.

"Do you really want to go?" Stephen asked his sister. "We are so happy here. As for me, there are days when I am not sure."

Mélanie, with illumined eyes, replied:

"I must, indeed, since God calls me," adding, almost gaily,

"But I shall carry a lot of handkerchiefs, a dozen at least, for I feel sure that I shall cry all the tears that are in me."

Why, oh why, then, that craze to go away when they said they were so happy at home? And I, too, why was I suffering in advance at the thought of leaving the house, since I had discovered that I was misunderstood and forlorn, and since I was determined to go?

One evening toward the end of August our friend Abbé Heurtevant came to see us, with a lenten face, so long and dolorous that we all expected to hear of some catastrophe. Mother hastily spoke for us all.

"Monsieur l'Abbé, for the love of God what has happened?"

"Ah, madame, Monseigneur is dead!"

I was the only one, except grandfather, who supposed him to be speaking of his ecclesiastical superior. But all the others understood, and bewailed the death of the Count de Chambord, who was known to have had an affection of the stomach for several days, or rather, as our abbé declared, to have been poisoned by strawberries. Aunt Deen burst out in tumultuous despair, my sisters endeavouring to console her, and father uttered a short obituary address which to me seemed lacking in heart.

"It is a misfortune for France, which he would have governed wisely. Monseigneur the Count of Paris succeeds him: the two princes had become reconciled, and that was the crown of a noble life. But what is the matter with you, Abbé?"

The abbé appeared to be even more inconsolable than Aunt Deen. Grandfather, who since the affair of the electoral lists had said less and less concerning his political opinions, could not control his tongue on this occasion:

"Why, don't you see that his prophecies are choking him? He is thinking of the Abbey of Orval and of Sister Rose-Colombe. No hope now of hoisting his 'young prince' to the throne. There he is, dead from eating too much fruit. And the new Pretender isn't much younger than the old one."

"Father, I beg!" protested father.

The abbé, crushed and crumpled in the depths of an easy chair, suddenly started up, drew up the long lines of his body till one might have thought he had

climbed upon something in order to orate, and in a thundering voice made confession of his faith:

"The King is dead. Long live the King! And the lilies will bloom again!"

"They will bloom again," repeated Aunt Deen, with conviction.

His public life checked, father was evidently transferring his ambition to our future: he was fulfilling himself in us. I alone withdrew myself from his solicitude, my suspicions having been aroused by Martinod's insinuations. It was not difficult for me to accumulate causes of vexation. Thus I refused to consider my departure — that departure which was my own doing — as any less important than that of Bernard for the colonies, Stephen for the Seminary, or Mélanie for the convent in the rue du Bac where the Sisters of Charity pass the time of their noviciate. Mélanie's going away especially wronged me, because it coincided with my own. The people who came to visit my mother on account of my sister's "holocaust" as Mlle Tapinois called it, exasperated me; they never alluded to me, no one condoled with my parents for losing me, no one noticed me, and yet I was going away, too. Even grandfather made not the slightest effort to keep me at home — nor so much as expressed any regret.

The day of separation came, a grey, rainy day, in harmony with the sadness that hung over the house. The laughing Louise followed, weeping,

every step of Mélanie, who clung closely to mother. Every one said insignificant nothings — no one had any appropriate words, and the time was slipping away. We must start for the station. We had begun to think of it long before the time, and mother added to her other anxieties her fear that we should be too late.

Neither grandfather nor Aunt Deen was to be of the escorting party. The former dreaded emotional exhibitions, and Aunt Deen excused herself to Mélanie; she simply could not weep silently, and she preferred to remain in solitude where she could give way to her grief without making a disturbance; having said which she began loudly to bewail herself.

I went up to the tower chamber with my sister.

"Till we meet again, grandfather," murmured Mélanie.

"Adieu, rather, little girl."

"No, grandfather; till we meet again in heaven, where we are all going."

He made a vague gesture which said only too plainly, "I won't spoil your illusions," adding,

"You are carrying out your own idea. You are right. Till we meet again, then, in the valley of Jehoshaphat."

He showed himself no more moved over me.

"Well, well, my boy; may Paris be good to you!"

We went out together, last of all. Mélanie kissed old Mariette, who murmured, "Can it be possible!" and stepped across the threshold. Twice she turned

again toward the house, and the second time she made the sign of the cross. We could hear Aunt Deen's cries from her closed room.

We were too early at the station, and had to drag out the time in the waiting-room and on the platform. Father busied himself with the tickets and the baggage. A few family friends who had come to bid us good-bye joined us with doleful faces and words of sympathy. Thus we had to endure Mlle Tapinois,— whom I could never think of except in her night dress with a candle in her hand, since I had recognised her in the aged dove in "Scenes of Animal Life"— and Abbé Heurtevant, who since the death of his monarch had grown bent, and could predict nothing but misfortune. Nothing could take place in our town without the whole population mixing in. Marriage, departure or death, the public claimed its share. Mother was politely thanking all these people whose presence so distressed her — she would fain have been alone with her daughter, and I could see that she was enduring martyrdom. The last moments of our being together were flying. Louise, Nicola and James clung to Mélanie — Bernard was trying to brighten the conversation, but his pleasantries fell wide of the mark. As for Stephen, absorbed, he was doubtless thinking that it would soon be his turn, or perhaps he was praying.

When the moment came, mother wanted to be the last to say good-bye; she clasped her daughter to her

breast without a word, then, relinquishing her hold she whispered low,

"My child, I bless thee."

I was beside her, waiting for my turn to say good-bye. I used to imagine to myself a parent's blessing as a solemn act, such as I had seen it in pictures; but here it was given in the twinkling of an eye, and without so much as the lifting of a hand.

But for the demonstrations of Mlle Tapinois, the abbé and several other persons who made a point of uttering memorable words, one might have thought that ours was just any ordinary going away. The train started. Having got in last, I was nearest the door. My father invited me to give that place to my sister. The invitation wounded me, for it sounded too much like an order. Of course I ought to have thought first of getting out of the way.

Mélanie extended her head from the window with no heed to the falling rain. She waved her arm — then as the train rounded a curve she turned back to the compartment with red eyes, but only to hasten to the other window. I knew that she was looking for the house, which was visible from that side. After that she sat down covering her face with her hands. As she remained thus, without moving, father gently took her in his arms.

"You know, my child, if it makes you too unhappy, I shall take you home again."

She raised her head, tears raining down her cheeks, and with a heart-broken smile replied,

"Oh, father, it is truly my vocation. Only I have been so happy at home,— and never again to see our mother, nor the house — it is hard!"

"And for us?" said my father.

He turned away his head. Perhaps if I had better appreciated his grief, I should have suffered less, in my corner, from thinking myself forgotten. But as he controlled himself, I was free to torment myself to my heart's content. My sister was going away to carry out her own idea, as grandfather had said, whereas I was being sent to prison. I quite forgot that I had myself asked to be sent. But had I not been a prisoner already, at our house? And in my rebellion, working myself up with the thought of Nazzarena on the high road, the sun shining through her hair and her teeth parted in her smile, I repeated to myself the phrase which chimed with the movement of the train,

"I want to be free! I want to be free!"

BOOK IV

I

THE EPIDEMIC

I WAS being prepared for liberty by years of seclusion, the history of which, after so many petty rebellions, I shall not set down here. I never became wonted to that boarding school to which I had demanded to be sent in a moment of pride which for nothing in the world would I have disavowed. Yet I passed for a good scholar, whose only fault was a little reserve or dissimulation.

I suffered frightfully during the first absence from home. I used to cry in the dormitory, my head smothered in the covers, until I fell asleep, enwrapped in my sorrow. But I never uttered a word of complaint.

My parents no doubt thought that I had accepted my new life without difficulty. My father wrote to me regularly and at length: no doubt this correspondence made an addition to his burdens for which I was not in the least obliged to him. Self love urged me to repel all his advances. Knowing nothing of Martinod's insinuations, how should he have guessed that I saw on every side injustice to myself, marks of preference for my brothers? I systematically distorted phrases, sentiments, thoughts.

If, in his virile love, he avoided expressions of affection, for fear of softening me, I accused him of harshness. If on the other hand he gave way to his fondness for me, it was simply to deceive me, and impose all the more upon me an authority which I exaggerated to the point of imagining that it was everywhere about me, an imagined persecution which became unsupportable. I usually wrote to my mother, and he never remarked upon the fact. Yet he noticed it, and several of his letters showed that he did. "I know," he once wrote, "that you do not care to confide in your father." And mother, who had also noticed it, missed no opportunity of writing about him, emphasising his kindness of heart above all his other merits, reminding me of instances of it, which exasperated me. If he had become aware of my purposed and tenacious hostility, he had no suspicion of its cause; and so the chasm which in the beginning a single step might easily have crossed, grew ever wider between us.

This tension of my mind inspired in me a great ardour for work. I achieved brilliant successes with perfect indifference, successes which contributed to deceive my family, who found in them a proof that I had accepted my new discipline. A *good pupil*, as my bulletins had it, could not but be a fine child and the joy of his family. Aunt Deen sent me extravagant compliments in bad handwriting, setting all down to the account of my filial affection. From grandfather I never heard.

But what were these positive results in comparison with the inward experiences that were going on in me? Little by little I relinquished all religious practices, building up for myself a sort of mysticism in which I formed a habit of taking refuge. Imagination substituted for my walks in the forest and other wild retreats, and even for my meetings with Nazzarena, a sort of abstract notion of nature and of love in which I found intense joy. I invented elusive landscapes and ideal passions. I was at the age in which one most easily lives in metaphysical chimeras, when ideas are mistaken for affections, and the sensibilities have no need of the spring-board of reality to leap into action. In my dreams I was my own master, until such time as life should make me independent. I had discovered the independence of the brain, and that it can supply all that is lacking. And to crown all, I threw myself into music as into an element which takes one's own shape; plastic and so to say liquid, it lent itself to all my longings with a docility which filled me with wonder. I had come upon the *Freischütz* and *Euryanthe*, that forest where the alleys reach beyond sight. It was more beautiful and especially more vast than the one which long ago had awakened me to the latent life of things. By it I scaled mountains higher and more inaccessible than that to which the shepherd had been leading his flock. And sometimes the sharp pain of the notes that I drew from my instrument brought back to me the unforgettable lamentation of the

nightingale in love with the rose: *All night long I wear out my throat for her, but she sleeps and hears me not.* For her? I did not know her name, I could not perceive her face, but that she existed I had not the slightest doubt. But — strange phenomenon — she was no longer Nazzarena: fidelity itself was but one more chain to break.

With the help of music and of my thoughts I built for myself a palace into which no visitor was admitted: they thought me present, and simply absent-minded, when in fact I had retreated to my solitude, the only place where I was actually myself. This faculty of concentration set me apart from friendship. No schoolfellow was admitted to my friendship; so that my family, against which I was in rebellion, by itself alone represented to me all humanity.

Thus all the seeds dropped during my convalescence were germinating in me after the lapse of a few years. I was free within myself, and no one suspected it. My parents were satisfied with my conduct and my place in school. I had the reputation of being quiet, obedient and easy to manage, and under the shelter of that reputation I let myself glide peacefully into a happy state in which I recognised no other law than my own and which was pretty near to anarchy. I made sacrifices to contingencies, but they counted for little in comparison with my inward joys.

When I went home for vacations my coldness and indifference surprised and saddened my family. Un-

able to understand them, they attributed them to humility, to the reserve which was characteristic of me, and they multiplied efforts to bring me back to natural ways — only to make me all the more distant. The laugh of Louise, who was now the flower of the house, was as powerless to thaw me out as the martial exhortations of Bernard, at home on leave, which simply exasperated me. As for the two younger children, Nicola and Jamie, I inspired in them a sort of fear, so that they avoided me. After having alienated them, there was nothing for me but to be vexed at their bad dispositions, which I was not slow to do.

Aunt Deen, seeking for a flattering explanation of my changed humour, discovered this:

"He is so superior!"

When my father got hold of me, with a little time to spare, he tried all means to resume the conversation that we had had on the hill of Malpas, that election day. With a secret disquietude which I felt, and which in a spirit of opposition only anchored me the more firmly in my attitude, he saw that I had closed my eyes to all that pertained to the field of observation, whether it were history, the past, tradition, laws, manners and customs, or practical everyday life, and confined myself to abstract reading, philosophy, mathematics, or threw myself still more absorbingly into music — an ambiguous and undefined régime, the mirages of which he dreaded for me. Deeply affected by the departure of Mélanie and

Stephen and the approaching absence of Bernard, who was at home merely for a few months before setting out for his destination in Tonkin, where the war seemed likely to be unending, he had hoped to talk intimately with me, to win me back, to guide me. I would listen to him courteously, hardly replying, and he could not misunderstand my silence and my distant manner. He never wearied in pointing out to me the superiority which in every profession, in all the course of human existence, is conferred by a clear vision of realities. How much intelligence, tact, even diplomacy, he must have expended in that effort to win me back which I constantly evaded, I now realise as I recall it all.

Nicola and James, now grown beyond babyhood, used to accompany us in these walks which were such a bore to me, and which recalled others, that I had loved; they were interested in his conversation, which almost became a monologue, and in after years I discovered in them the impress of these teachings by which they had unconsciously profited, while I was determinedly refractory to them. Sometimes I would hear in his voice — suddenly grown imperious — the echo of that which on that memorable day had thrilled me to the marrow, and I almost expected to hear him say, as then, *But understand me, poor child. You must indeed understand me — your future is at stake* — then the excited voice would calm itself, or would be silent. My father had recognised the uselessness of his effort.

I was able also effectively to evade the solicitations of my mother, who sought my confidence and was troubled by my indifference to religion.

"You don't pray enough," she would say to me. "You don't know how necessary it is. It is the most real thing in the world."

I had, however, been clever enough to resume relations with grandfather without awakening suspicion. We used to practise together, though he trembled a little and his violin seemed tremulous. Or we would discuss a sonata or a symphony for hours together. Thus I had watched him admiringly years ago, in the Café des Navigateurs, getting off into a corner with Gallus. If any member of the family undertook to join in our conversation we would gaze at him in a superior manner, as at a profane person incapable of an intelligent opinion. Music could have meaning only for us; it belonged to us; and through it we resumed our former intimacy.

I had entered upon my eighteenth year when the event occurred which was to decide my future life. The baccalaureates had covered me with honour, and for a year past I had been preparing for the Central School, with no particular drawing toward it, and even with perfect indifference. A certain taste for natural sciences, purposely abandoned, had for a time given my father the false hope that I should return to the plans of my childhood, and could even be his successor some day. But I had chosen the

calling of engineer because it would take me away from home, and permit me to be my own master.

When the time came for us to return home the first figure that we never failed to see on the platform at the station was that of our father, who had hastened to meet us. His face would be actually illuminated with paternal love. I used to greet him as if I had left him the day before, but he would not let himself be put off so, and would always open his arms to me as if he were finding me after I had long been lost. These effusions in public appeared to me very vulgar, and I evaded them most artfully.

It was the end of July. Examinations over, I had come home for the vacation. Having thoroughly irritated me by clasping me to his breast, my father had me get into a carriage, my valise at our feet, and we took the road to the house, which was at the other end of the town, and on its outskirts, as I have elsewhere described.

We were crossing the Market Square when a group of the lower sort of people cast hostile glances at us, accompanied by low growls; then some one cried,

"Down with Rambert."

I turned in amazement to my father, who had made no reply, and was even smiling at those who insulted him; — oh, not that smile that I had already seen upon his lips when preparing for a conflict, but a smile almost of sympathy, of commiseration. Why this sudden unpopularity? They might refuse to

elect him, but they had respected, and above all, feared him. The coachman had already whipped up his horse, a few hoots pursued us. I could not but ask what it all meant.

"Oh, nothing," he said. "Some poor creatures. I will tell you about it."

The household rushed to the steps to meet us. It was the usual proceeding, at the return of each absent one. Grandfather alone did not stir, and I heard his violin giving forth its plaintive melody from the tower chamber. Father told of the manifestations of which we had been victims.

"Oh, the wretches!" exclaimed Aunt Deen, who by reason of rheumatism in the leg limped a little, but whom years had robbed of none of her warlike virtue. "They came all the way here a while ago; they or some others. Fortunately the gate was closed."

She had barricaded us against "them," our enemies.

"Oh, my God!" murmured mother—"if only nothing happens to you, Michel!"

Father explained the recent incident. The municipality which had been elected three years previously had given orders for important aqueducts to be built to bring water to the public fountains. These works had been awarded to a somewhat unscrupulous and even disreputable contractor, who had been put forward by important political influences. It appeared that within a few days father had discovered two or three cases of typhus, both

in the hospital and in the working people's quarter, and he attributed them to the water recently introduced into the city, which must have been either contaminated or ill trapped. If he had been correct in his diagnosis of the origin of the disease he dreaded an epidemic. He had therefore at once laid before the mayor a request for the immediate closing of the suspected fountains, and had asked for a decree enjoining the use of boiled water only, with other precautionary measures. Whereupon the mayor, who was a grocer by the name of Baboulin, being advised by his deputy, Martinod, had refused the request out of deference to public sentiment. Our town, built like an amphitheatre above the lake, was a chosen summer resort of a large colony of strangers. If there should be any talk of contagion the season's business would be ruined at a stroke. And besides, it would have been an avowal of the inadequacy of those famous improvements of which, according to custom, much had been made to add to the fame of the town. The quarrel had leaked out, and the public had violently taken the side against the prophet of evil.

I listened to the story with the indulgence of a traveller whose duty it is to share politely in the interests of his hosts. This was provincial gossip, quick to be born, soon to die; and I had come from Paris. Our friend Abbé Heurtevant dropped in at nightfall to lend strength to them. Since the decease of the Count de Chambord he had predicted

nothing but plagues, wars, cyclones and catastrophes of all sorts. He was in his element now, and scented from afar an odour of cholera which would re-establish his blemished reputation and punish the Republic.

"I hear," he said to my father, "that they are going to give you a tin pan serenade to-night."

"A serenade," repeated Aunt Deen. "I should like to see them! I'll empty a boiler of boiling water on their heads, since they won't have boiled water to drink."

"Very well," said my father. "I'll wait."

After dinner, mother, who was anxious, asked us to recite prayers in common. I hesitated to join in these invocations which I deemed puerile, and I only did repeat them with my lips, without heart, merely, I said to myself, to avoid sowing discord the first day. As for grandfather, he had valiantly mounted to his tower to direct his telescope upon I know not what planet.

About nine o'clock we heard a formidable clamour, but it was far away. For a time it neither drew nearer nor became more distant. The crowd that made it must be marking time. We distinctly distinguished a sort of refrain of two notes, the meaning of which we could not grasp. Suddenly the bell rang at the gate.

"There they are!" exclaimed Aunt Deen.

But no; under the gas jet only one shadow was distinguishable, and that a small one. Aunt Deen

and mother were of opinion that the gate should be opened only for a good reason.

"Probably some one is sick," observed my father; and he himself went to the gate. He recognised in the nocturnal visitor Mimi Pachoux, who had furtively hastened thither to tell us:

"It appears, Doctor, that there are other cases; and they are assaulting the mayor's office."

"Oh, truly? What is it that they are shouting?"

"Resign! Resign!"

"Very well, good friend. I am going."

When this dialogue was reported to Aunt Deen she wanted to reward our labourer's devotion, but father checked her.

"Oh, don't be in a hurry, aunt. He ran away from me these last days. He simply anticipates the popular movement, when he is perfectly sure of its direction."

Then turning to me he asked, "Will you go with me? It will be a change from your studies."

It was one of those fine moonless nights of July when the stars seem to hang low from the dark dome of heaven, like suspended lamps. We reached the square of the City Hall, which was black with people, all the air resounding with the one cry,

"Resign! Resign!"

We were at the back of the crowd, which was stamping and vociferating before the fast-closed municipal building. There were groups of citizens gathered from the cafés, into which the news had doubtless

spread, and there were also many family groups, with children in their arms, the women more excited than the men, some of them demanding that the mayor should be ducked in the fountain. To say truth, such an act would have required considerable good will. To my mind, all those Chinese shadows gesticulating in the uncertain light appeared supremely ridiculous. Absorbed in my own interior life, I took not the slightest interest in their goings on.

Suddenly a light shone forth from a room of the City Hall which opened upon a balcony. Mayor Baboulin had decided to reassure his constituency. But it was in vain that he essayed to make himself heard; epithets of all sorts were flying through the air at him, prisoner, traitor, knave, and others less elegant but even more sonorous.

Another man appeared beside him. My old friend Deputy Martinod, trusting to his popularity and his gifts of speech, came forward. But the hullabaloos continued, while vituperations even more familiar and offensive were showered upon him. In the gaslight I recognised near me the inseparable Gallus and Merinos conscientiously reviling their old friend.

"You see," said my father, making no attempt to moderate his voice, "what to expect of the populace. Yesterday they were hurrahing for them; today they insult them."

I confess that I was surprised to hear him express

himself so freely, in that strong, ringing voice which always so disturbed grandfather. Only a few hours ago, as we were driving from the station, hadn't the populace hooted at him, too? What if they should begin again? We were not behind the shelter of walls nor under the protection of the police. Just at that moment one of the demonstrators turned, crimson-faced and open-mouthed. A light was reflected full upon him; it was Tem Bossette, in person, facing us, full and overflowing like a wine-bottle, gesticulating even more vigorously than the others. The moment he saw us he cried aloud:

"Long live Rambert!"

All around him uprose a great tumult, and to my stupefaction every one was crying, "Long live Rambert!" at the top of his lungs. Father touched me on the shoulder, whispering,

"Let's get out of this: we've had enough!"

A little more and our retreat would have been cut off, and we should have been obliged to submit to the unexpected ovation. Rapidly, before they could get into line to accompany us, we gained a cross street and hastened to the house, where the family were awaiting us. The shadow at the window told us of the disquietude which our absence had caused. Father gaily related what had happened, describing Tem's intervention.

"Good fellow!" exclaimed Aunt Deen approvingly.

To which father replied:

"Oh, he is a worse case than Mimi. The last few days he hasn't even said good morning to me."

"What business is it of his?" asked grandfather, who was troubled about the epidemic. "He is in no danger. He has never been a hard drinker."

"Hark!" exclaimed mother — so quick to be fearful for us.

The expected clamour was certainly approaching; the sounds were growing more distinct; in a moment they would be intelligible.

"Oh, my God!" she added; "what is going to happen next!"

Father laughingly reassured her:

"This time, Valentine, they are cheering. It's more than I asked for. This afternoon I was only fit for a ducking; this evening I am a saviour."

How little he cared for public favour! He wore his battle smile, and I thought it very contemptuous. In the mysticism in which I had taken refuge I held myself aloof from all mankind; but so long as I was not obliged to associate with them I was quite willing to grant them all the virtues, even that of consistency. The crowd was already defiling before the gate, singing,

It's Rambert, Rambert, Rambert,
It's Rambert that we need!

Was there then only one Rambert? Grandfather, for whom no one was calling, slipped away, I alone observing his movement of retreat; he was probably

going back to his tower, returning quietly to his telescope; the planet that he had been observing had not yet sunk below the horizon.

I would fain have followed him, but father asked me to look out. I looked, without interest, at the confused mass whose surges were beating against the gate and the wall of enclosure. It might have been a long, enormous serpent, a long, enormous mole-cricket whose body filled the breadth of the street, and whose tail must have stretched far away, beyond the turn of the road.

Suddenly the gate gave way, and the great beast, like the gipsies long ago, invaded the short avenue and the flower borders. In a moment it was assaulting the house. Aunt Deen, at my side, was torn between the joys of popularity and the instinctive defence of our garden.

By way of checking the onrush of the multitude father opened the window. He was saluted with a tempest of applause, but easily commanded silence, his voice ringing out like a deep-toned church bell:

"My friends," he said, "we shall do all we can to check the progress of this scourge. Count upon me, go back home, and above all, invoke the help of God."

Invoke the help of God! But it was he whom they looked upon as Providence! In all that manifestation my mother had been the only one who had thought of praying. Aunt Deen was drinking in her nephew's words, but their eloquence touched me not

at all. I could have wished him to utter a few noble sentiments in praise of science, which alone was capable of dealing with epidemics and preventing contagions; but of science my father had said never a word. At that moment I noticed how large a number of good women were in the crowd, some of them brandishing their babies at arms' length, as if offering them to my father. No doubt he had been talking for the good women.

Nevertheless he had gained his point. Little by little the crowd was calming down and gradually dribbling away. They passed out of the gate, and the lovely summer night, but now torn with shoutings, slowly gained its empire over the last lingerers in the garden, over the roads and the fields, and gave them back to silence.

Events began to hurry one upon another, the very next morning. The municipal council, responsible for the defective work upon the aqueducts, resigned under general obloquy and contempt.

"There are your electors!" said our father at table. "First rejoicing in the triumph of the mayor and council over conservatism, and now demanding the disgrace of those very men and dragging them in the mud with shame."

In a flash I saw myself again in the Café des Navigateurs a few years before, drinking champagne with Martinod and his heelers, in honour of grandfather's candidacy, and far from revolting me, the memory

touched my heart. Then, a child, I had quaffed a sort of delicious recklessness, something like that love-languor that Nazzarena, passing out of my life, had left with me, listening to those fine theories which were not very clear to me but were preparing me for liberty nevertheless.

The excitement increased in the town with the increase in the number of deaths, which, however, were still few. The exact figures which my father gave by no means corresponded with those that were printed in the newspapers, or flew from lip to lip. He had forbidden us to go into the town, grandfather approving:

"One never knows how those things get caught — a mere nothing is enough. It's quite enough to have so many sick persons coming here."

I had found grandfather aging, when I came home. He was nearly eighty, of course, but he had so long kept his air of youth, the alert step due to his long walks, and even his bright eyes, their sarcastic glint only emphasised by the gathering wrinkles. Now he was growing bent, and his gaze seemed dimmed. Still he clung to life, and perhaps all the more as he felt his strength failing.

The most absurd and contradictory rumours were flying about everywhere, and political passions had free course. An individual had been caught putting poison into the river; — a priest, said the anti-clericals; a free mason, said the others. A frightful mania of suspicion began to run wild. An unlucky

fellow with a pimpled face just missed of being strung up, on the pretext of spreading contagion, and was only saved by my father's intervention:

"Pimples on the face are the only ones that mean nothing!" he had shouted, just in time.

He brought home to us all these incidents and rumours, for we went nowhere; he even carefully disinfected himself on returning from his rounds.

Next, the villages below the water-works thought the contagion had reached them, and were struck with panic, their inhabitants crowding to the town. We could see them passing with their carts, their cattle, their furniture, like fugitives before the face of war. Brawls arose from attempts to keep them out.

Then suddenly the epidemic, which until then had been under control, its ravages greatly exaggerated, took on a disturbing character, whether in consequence of the crowded state of the town and the lack of hygiene, or because the air had really become tainted. The general terror became itself a danger. Pestilence and famine were said to be upon us. Abbé Heurtevant, who, all devotion to the sufferers, yet seemed to breathe in a sort of consolation from the atmosphere of catastrophe, seeing in all this the fulfilment of his prophecies, and who could not but discern signs of divine intervention, was formally accused of sorcery, and was obliged to run to earth in his own room for several days, lest evil should befall him. Mlle Tapinois had given the signal for departure, abandoning her work-rooms, which mother

took up without comment. The hotels were emptied, and all the people who could fly from town fled.

The lack of organisation increased the evil. The municipality had resigned and the prefect was taking the waters in Germany. The electors were convoked on a call of urgency. Then came a rush for father. Every day there was a crowd before the gate crying, *Long live Rambert!* or *It's Rambert we must have.* Aunt Deen was never surfeited with this refrain, which was music to her ears. Only he — there was no one but Michel.

I did not see and I cannot describe the despairing town, the shops closed for fear of pillage, the inhabitants torn by party enmity, haunted by all sorts of suspicion, clinging to every superstition, ravaged by bitterness and poverty, and given over to terror. But I did see with my own eyes, at our very feet, there under our very windows, the town entreating one man, submitting to him, grovelling before him, whom formerly they would have none of. The multitude dragged itself in the dust, moaned, uttered howls of desire like an infuriated dog. And not comprehending its distress I despised it.

My father had lost his authority over me, not from having abused it, notwithstanding that I had imagined tyranny in some of his acts, but perhaps — who can say? — for not having exerted it, that evening when he brought me back from the Café des Navigateurs, that day when in the tower chamber I had braved him in defence of grandfather. He had no

suspicion either of my first experience of love, which had played havoc in my heart, nor of the intensity of those aspirations after liberty which had been slowly infiltrated into it by all those walks and conversations.

Yet he had felt my detachment from the house, and had trusted to clemency to bring me back. And that clemency had belittled him in my eyes. His prestige had been made up of his never-failing victories, and had I not heard him in mother's room, uttering the laments of one conquered? By his pain I had measured my own importance. The greater price he set upon the reconquest of myself, the stronger I felt to resist him. Perhaps he would have kept his empire over me had he not showed such an excess of paternal solicitude. Would it be dangerous for a sovereign to take too much pains in training his heir and fitting him to succeed to the throne? Must one put more confidence in words and acts than in the influence which one tries to exert over minds? Each generation differs from the former in the expression of its ideas if not in the ideas themselves. It thinks to create all things anew: life will teach it that nothing is created, and that everything goes on by the same processes.

Now, in the time of danger, that authority from which I had withdrawn myself imposed itself upon every one else. My father had been in charge of the medical service. Now, elected almost unanimously, he was entrusted with the town.

II

THE ALPETTE

Our father and mother held a council of war, in which the resolution was taken that we should be sent away. The family owned, on the uplands of one of the high valleys, a chalet which we called the Alpette, standing by itself in a clearing in the pines. In favourable seasons we used to spend a month of the long vacation there. A dilapidated stagecoach used to climb to the nearest village in four or five hours. It was not easy to get supplies up there, and we should have to be content with frugal and modest fare; but the air was redolent of balsam, and we should be beyond all danger of contagion.

"The epidemic is spreading," father told us. "You will all go to-morrow morning except your mother, who will not leave me."

Perhaps he had resolved to remain alone, but had encountered her refusal.

"That's an excellent idea," said grandfather approvingly. "We are good for nothing here. but rather, in the way."

"Well! I for one shall not go," declared Aunt Deen, shaking her head. "I am a part of the building."

Father urged that she had her brother to take care of, but this argument was by no means favourably received.

"He can take care of himself well enough. He is perfectly well. And besides, Louise will look after him."

Louise urged her desire to stay. We thought she was joking, for she said it laughingly, but she firmly insisted. Couldn't she be of service, visiting the sick, nursing them even? Wasn't every willing person needed? Between her and Aunt Deen a debate arose, the unselfishness of which was at the time unperceived by me; but Aunt Deen insisted so hard that she carried her point.

Encouraged by this example, I signified to my parents my fixed intention not to leave town, but to play my part in it also. This was by way of affirming my personality — my personality of barely eighteen years! — much more than as a boast of courage. The idea of death, either my own or that of the others, had not occurred to me. I did not apprehend the slightest danger. No doubt father was the most exposed, both by his profession and his functions, but to me he seemed immortal. I was simply thinking of gaining a little importance.

Father listened to me patiently, and then replied that if I had begun to study medicine, as he had hoped, he should not have hesitated to make use of me, notwithstanding his affection and his fears; it would have been a right which I might have

claimed; but that having taken another course, I had no good reason for remaining in a vitiated atmosphere, where I could be of no use, at the risk of succumbing to the disease any day. He thanked me for my offer, but could not accept it. The mountain air would be good for my health, which would improve up there: I was somewhat delicate, I should return stronger.

The calm refusal simply exasperated me. I discerned in it a contempt that was not to be endured, and I persisted in claiming the post as if my honour was involved.

"I regret infinitely, father, my inability to yield in this matter, but I judge that I ought to stay, and I shall stay."

The words came grandly. He fixed me with his piercing eyes, and did not even raise his voice:

"I rule in my house, before ruling in the town, my boy. I give you this order: You will go to-morrow with your grandfather, Louise and the two younger children. I am in charge of the whole city: we shall see whether my son will be the first to disobey."

He turned away. So peremptorily had he spoken that a sense of the impossibility of resistance took possession of me. He had been humouring me this long time; he had thought from my reserve that I was indifferent if not hostile, and he cherished the hope of regaining my confidence. Now he suddenly abandoned all methods of conciliation and put me back in the ranks like a mere soldier, not like a

future chief. Without caring the least in the world about taking active service among the hospital staff, I champed my bit with rage, as if I had been subjected to the most cruel abuse. Grandfather, delighted with this outcome, consoled me good-naturedly.

"Oho! what do you care? He has a craze for giving orders. We shall be very well off up there."

Our preparations filled the afternoon. Grandfather himself brought down from the tower his barometer, violin, pipes and almanacs. The repeated journeys put him out of breath, but he would stop for no one. The rest of the packing was of no interest to him, but concerned Aunt Deen, to whom he had long ago given over the care of his clothes and linen. At nightfall Abbé Huertevant came for a visit. Father was at the hospital, or the mayor's office, and mother at the workrooms where bed clothing for the sick poor was being made. Grandfather, with new found resolution, refused to have the door opened, and inquired from the window whether our friend had been disinfected.

Nothing would do but for the abbé to pass through the disinfecting room that had been set up in the house, after which he was welcomed with gladness, and grandfather even offered him his copy of the prophecies of Michel Nostradamus. M. Huertevant accepted the gift with small enthusiasm; he was acquainted with the Centuries and found them obscure and contradictory.

"Yes, you prefer Sister Rose-Colombe and the Abbey of Orval. And what catastrophes have you to report, Abbé?"

"In the first place, your labourer Tem Bossette died this morning of the pestilence."

"Ah!" said grandfather, quickly adding, as if finding an excuse for not grieving, "he was a drunkard."

"Poor Tem!" sighed Aunt Deen. "Had he confessed?"

"He had no time — the complaint seized him like a thunderclap."

"An alcoholic," observed grandfather.

My aunt went on questioning our guest about persons of our acquaintance:

"How about Beatrix? And Mimi Pachoux?"

"Don't be uneasy about your Mimi, mademoiselle; he is helping to bury the dead, and is even superintending the entire force of gravediggers. His zeal is magnificent; he multiplies himself, he is at every funeral. As for The Hanged, I think he is down with the fever."

"I will go and see him," said Aunt Deen simply, whereupon her brother looked at her with surprise, and some disapprobation.

But the abbé, with incomparable ease, had already passed from special misfortunes to general calamities. The contagion would be sure to spread, it would not be checked until it had reached Paris. It would decimate the capital, that sink of all iniqui-

ties, and would constrain politicians to reflect. It would be as good as a war, in the matter of moral renovation. And the lilies would bloom again.

"They will bloom again," Aunt Deen did not fail to repeat gravely.

The description of these approaching misfortunes affected grandfather, who changed the subject of conversation.

"I say, Abbé, if you will come to the Alpette to see us, we will give you some Satan bolets, and even if you don't bring too much bad news, some negro head bolets, which are at least eatable and of a savoury flavour. Or rather, no! don't put yourself out to come. There is no disinfecting apparatus up there, and you would be capable of contaminating us all."

The next morning a two-horse brake, ordered especially for us, came to take us and our parcels. Father superintended the embarkation, and hastened it, for he was being called upon from all quarters at once. At the house, whenever any difficulty arose he had always been immediately sought for, all calling in one voice, *Monsieur Michel! Where is Monsieur Michel!* In these days, all through the city, the rallying cry was, *Monsieur Rambert!* or more briefly, *the doctor*, or *the mayor*.

"Oho!" said grandfather lightly, "he has enough to give orders to now."

Grandfather climbed into the vehicle first, with his instruments, which he would not let go, though the

violin case was much in the way. Like little Jamie, he had all the gaiety of a school boy on vacation. Never had he seemed so to feel the attractions of the Alpette. Louise, on the contrary, and Nicola, imitating her sister, whom she admired, manifested an emotion which for my part I deemed excessive. They clung to our parents with tears, as if it were a case of prolonged absence.

"Come, children," said father, "make haste and have no fears."

My own adieus to him were of marked coldness, because of the scene of the previous day. He had constrained me to obedience, and had wounded my pride; I could not forget it so soon; dignity obliged me to assume an offended air.

The smallest details of that departure, upon which my memory has dwelt so much, vainly seeking something to mitigate its bitterness, stand out before me with a distinctness which time has never blurred. Every one was more or less impatient, the horses because of the flies that tormented them, the coachman out of compassion for his cattle, grandfather and Jamie in their haste to enjoy the pleasures of the journey, Louise and Nicola in their sadness over going away, Aunt Deen because she dreaded the tumult of her feelings, and I, to get rid of the uneasiness that was overcoming me. Mother was trying to keep calm. Father alone did so, naturally. When my turn came to get in, last of all, he seemed to hesitate for a brief moment as if he would have de-

tained me, spoken to me. I do not precisely know what it was that showed me this, but I am sure of it. And once in my seat I felt an unreasoning desire to get out again. Was it an instinctive longing for reconciliation? How I long to feel sure that it was! But the feeling was too vague for me to be sure of it now. Taking my place on the same seat with grandfather, I gave expression to my inward feeling by an act of ill humour, seizing hold of the violin case, which chafed my knees, and laying it roughly in the bottom of the carriage.

"Be careful! It's delicate," observed grandfather protestingly.

I can still see the vibrating light in the air, and the shining of the road in the sunlight.

"All right?" asked the coachman, clambering to his seat.

"Forward!" ordered father.

And mother added the prayer that she always uttered at each parting.

"God be with you!"

Our heavy vehicle was already in motion, and these were the last words that we heard. *Forward*, and *God be with you;* they mingle, become one, always accompany one another in my memory, and whenever to this day I set out upon a journey, it seems to me that I hear them.

At the turn of the road, down below the entrance gate, I saw the three figures standing out in the glaring day, Aunt Deen somewhat massive; my

mother's, more delicate, and the tall, proud figure of my father, lifting up his head. Why did I not call out? The one word, "Father!" would have pleased him, and he would have understood. His figure revealed such force, so rich a vitality, so dominant an authority, that it was of course of no use to humiliate oneself to give him satisfaction. I should always have time enough if I wanted to do so,— later, later.

Grandfather was fumbling about my legs to rescue his violin case and I had to help him. We passed under the chestnut tree that had overshadowed — just one moment — the departing Nazzarena, Nazzarena laughing and showing her teeth. And the house was lost behind us.

I was not slow to forget this uncomfortable parting in the enchantment of my new life in the chalet of the Alpette. For the first time I was absolute master of my days. Grandfather exercised not the slightest oversight. He liked to sit for hours together on a bench on the pleasantest side of the house, warming himself in the sun and smoking his pipe. He took no walks except in the immediate neighbourhood, going with difficulty even to the pine woods, for his legs had become weak and could not carry him far. Once in the woods, he would devote himself to his favourite pursuit, which had not changed, the hunt after mushrooms. He especially pursued and not without success the negro head bolet, which grows well in the shadow of the pines.

Jamie and his inseparable Nicola used to go with him, and stoop for him to retrieve the game which he pointed out to them. He preferred their childhood to my youth, and I was not jealous of them. He never tried to establish with them the intimacy that had formerly existed between him and me. He shrank from all fatigue, from any conversation which would have led to discussions, explanations, was contented with trifling facts not open to debate. For my part, I preferred my solitude.

Whether from sisterly affection or because she had received instructions to this effect, Louise busied herself with us even to obsession; she would have cut herself in two to be at the same time with me and with the two little ones. When she had become convinced of the peaceful, commonplace character of grandfather's conversation, she turned all the more to me, hoping to be my confidant, and to gain a little influence over me. She was only two years my senior, and her conduct filled me with wonder, for nothing down in the town had given any indication that altitude would so totally change her. Pretty, lively, care-free, I had deemed her rather volatile and even a bit capricious — and had been not the less pleased with her for that. At times she would rush at her piano with intense zeal, and again she would not touch it for weeks. She filled the house with her laughter, her charming spirits, her quick movements. "She won't be one to interfere with me," I had thought in the carriage. And now, behold her sud-

denly changed into something like the head of a community or a family boarding house, thoughtful and kindly, but exacting, even arbitrary. One must be punctual at meals, explain his absences, guard his words before the children, not turn either principles or people into ridicule. Had her responsibilities changed her and turned her head? She assumed the place of our parents in matters of conscience, but I gave her to understand that boys didn't obey girls, and that any directions she might have received did not concern me. She insisted, and almost from the outset we were in a state of tension which was almost conflict.

It was the Sunday after our arrival. The village was two kilometres distant, and only one mass — high mass — was celebrated. Louise informed us of the fact, and at what she judged the proper moment she called to us to set out. Grandfather, who never went to church, raised a disinterested objection.

"Public places are the most unhealthy. Beware of the epidemic."

"There has not been a single case of typhus in the whole valley," said Louise triumphantly.

"Very well," said grandfather, filling his morning pipe.

I then informed my sister that I had planned to take a walk and regretted that I could not escort her. She looked at me in astonishment, such astonishment that I can still see the surprise in her limpid eyes.

"What, you are not going to mass, Francis? There is only one."

"No," I replied with my most assured manner.

"It isn't possible!"

Her eyes, those limpid eyes, at once filled with tears, and I remembered the first mass that I had missed. Pride forbade me to yield, pride and also that new, vague belief which my imagination had built up. Louise pushed Nicola and Jamie before her, and turned to me, her book of hours in her hand, still hoping to move me.

"I beg you, come with us."

If she had added, "to please me," perhaps I would have yielded, so alarmed did she appear. She no doubt would have deemed that plea unworthy of its purpose. This time I refused still more emphatically.

"I shall be obliged to write to mamma," she urged as a last argument.

"As you please."

She did not, however, carry out her threat. Her sense of delicacy warned her not to add to our parents' anxieties in the midst of their battle with the pestilence. On the contrary, she doubled her attention to me, trying to win me to her, to gain my friendship, my confidence. With innate art she became an improvised mother of the family, ever trying to bring us together, to group us, warring against the isolation in which I delighted.

When a letter came she would call us together and

read it aloud to us. We received letters from home very regularly, and they forwarded Mélanie's to us from the hospital in London, where she was caring for the sick; Bernard's from his expedition in Tonkin; Stephen's, who was completing his theological studies in Rome. Through her the absent ones visited us, and if it had depended only upon her we should have carried on at the Alpette the same life as at home. It was precisely that which revolted me, and I rose in rebellion against the twenty-year-old will which, with unlooked for tenacity, went counter to mine.

To place myself beyond her influence I formed the habit of leaving our chalet with a book the first thing in the morning, returning only for meals. Uneasy about me, she would remain upon the doorstep until I had disappeared, and very often, at my return, I would find her in the same place, as if she had never lost sight of me. Her interest extended even to my reading. The library at the Alpette contained only a few books, some odd volumes of Buffon and Lacépède, a "Dictionary of Conversation" in fifty volumes, a copy of "Jocelyn," and a few less important works. Even the Dictionary did not terrify me and I would resolutely carry with me the volumes containing biographical notices, or systems of philosophy. I found myself at ease in the boldest or the most obscure of their conceptions. I understood them before I had completed their demonstration, whether they put the universe in subjection to the

ego, or whether they put man in subjection to the universe left to itself. Still, I was inclined to believe that everything depended upon our intelligence, and that it alone, by its sole power breathed existence into things, the laws of which were fixed by it. I have never since been able to regain such facility in moving in the abstract, nor such pleasure and pride.

When wearied by these adventures in metaphysics, I would refresh myself with the poetry of "*Jocelyn*." It harmonised so perfectly with the nature that surrounded me that it seemed to become its natural expression and I ceased to think of distinguishing between them. How many times, under the pines, have I repeated lines which from that time have been fixed in my memory:

> I went from tree to tree and loved them all;
> I took from them a sense of tears and wept;
> Believing thus, so strong the deep heart's call,
> That answering thrills through all their rough bark swept.

So greatly did I long to feel pervading everything around me, in the soul of the trees or the spirit of the earth, the love which I refused to receive from the family. When I reached the top of some hill, it was in the apostrophe

> Oh, mountain tops, pure air and floods of light!

that my rapture found expression. The serenity of the night spoke to me of *peace, love, eternity*. I dreamed of Laurence, and had no difficulty in pic-

turing him to myself, such a model of precision did his portrait seem to me:

> Never the hand of God on fifteen years
> Had marked a soul more lovely or more human.

What more was wanting to feed a love which, having no object, created its image for itself?

Another book, however, was destined to enter still more deeply into my sensibility, corresponding as it did with that condition of independence and enfranchisement to which I deemed myself to have attained. Into the pile of almanacs brought thither by grandfather had slipped that copy of the "Confessions" which had puzzled me as a child, and which I had taken for a manual of piety. The innocent *Limping Messenger of Berne and Vevey* came leading by the hand that Jean-Jacques whom, long before I knew him, I had heard spoken of as if he were still living and we might meet him anywhere in our walks. I had read in school only short fragments of his writings in which I had found nothing personal. I fell upon the narrative of that troubled life, which at first disgusted me. The theft of the ribbon in the house of Mme de Vercellis and the cowardly accusation that followed, certain physiological details which I could ill understand, the title of *maman* bestowed upon Mme de Warens, produced upon me the effect of immodest confidences, and all alone as I was in the forest, or lying in the grass on the top of the mountain, I felt myself blushing to the ears. My

deepest nature resisted, but by an insensible decline I came even to admire the man who could humiliate himself by such avowals; not perceiving their pride I felt giddied by their truth.

After that the volume never left me. Louise, disturbed by this preoccupation, tried to wield some censorship. One evening as I came in from gazing at the stars — those in the South, which I most easily recognised — I found her under the lamp looking into the "Confessions." She did not see me and I watched her; she suddenly closed the book, and perceiving me, her indignation burst forth:

"You have no right to read this book."

"I read what I please."

She appealed to grandfather, who declined all responsibility.

"Oh, every one is free. And at least Jean-Jacques is sincere."

The love passages excited me, and what rendered them more precious and more seductive to me was the writer's lovely way of praising at once the peace of the country and the happiness of bucolic life. In the peace that environed me I felt more plainly the movements of my own heart. I was at the feet of Mme Basile *without daring so much as to touch her dress. A slight movement of her finger,— hand lightly pressed against my lips, were the only favours I ever received from her, and the memory of these slight favours transports me as I think of them.* I would try to represent to myself the gentle air of

those fair women whom no heart could resist, and — shall I be believed? — I found a personal application in a lament which touched my hardly completed and already disquieted eighteen years. *Tormented with the desire to love without ever finding its satisfaction, I saw myself drawing nigh to the gates of old age and dying without having lived.* When I climbed high enough to see the lake, far away at the foot of the hills, I would repeat the simple aspiration, *All I desire is a sure friend, a loving wife, a cow and a little boat,* and my growing exaltation of sentiment seemed endowed with innocence. I could have wept for love while eating strawberries smothered in sweet cream.

Thus the period through which I was passing was very closely linked with that of my convalescence, of which it became in a sort the completion. Alone by myself I resumed the walks which a few years before I had taken with grandfather. His friend Jean-Jacques was with me in his stead. These were not the same places, but in natural aspects there was small difference between them. They had the same glamour of wildness, that flutter of vegetation stirred by the slightest breath, the sparkle of waters; and the greater altitude even added a more exhilarating air, farther distances, less accessible to the works of man, a new exaltation. In the mountains the holdings are without walls or gates. No enclosure mars the beauty of the land, and individual ownership is not apparent, — that ownership which, as I knew from grandfather's teachings, corrupts the

heart of man and fills it with greed, jealousy and cupidity. On the mountains field and forest belong to every one and to no one, like the sun and the air, like health. The upper pastures, whither the shepherd who in one sentence had revealed longing to me, was leading his sheep,— now I was treading their short grass. Mountain climbing thrilled me with an ardour for conquest, and with each height gained I hoped to meet her whom I was awaiting but who continually evaded me. She was not Nazzarena, whom I had loved and whom now my dreams disdained; who seemed to me too young, too simple. I thought rather of the unknown lady of the pavilion, or still more of her who had appeared before me on the road, all in white with a hat trimmed with cherries, and a flower-like face, she whose parasol made an aureola about her, and whom I had called Helen since I knew that her beauty was like that of the immortal goddesses.

I was alone, deliciously alone, and in love, with no beloved one. I was perfectly happy, and never realised that I was torturing my sister Louise, whose affection I misunderstood. I was free.

By reason of the difficulty of procuring provisions our table was the most frugal in the world. We lived upon eggs, potatoes, cheese, and on Sundays had the luxury of a fowl. Grandfather was never tired of extolling the excellencies of this fare, and the benefits of pastoral life. It was easy for me to persuade

myself of the excellence of our mode of living. I took less and less interest in the news from town that reached us by the diligence. Once or twice, to give us fuller intelligence, they sent up the farmer himself, so that in our hermitage we knew the number of deaths and the ravages of the pestilence. The Hanged, who was dead, had made a most edifying end, Aunt Deen being with him to the last. Gallus and Merinos were safe and sound.

"They are always in luck," observed grandfather.

The farmer shook his head as if to say that the last word hadn't been said yet, and that the ravages of the epidemic were not over. Of Martinod he knew nothing; he was still in hiding. Our friend Abbé Heurtevant had resisted but he was undermined; however he still had life enough to predict catastrophes.

"May we go back?" Louise would ask each time. This astonished grandfather and me, for we were in no hurry.

"Not yet, Miss; Master Michael has said like this, that the moment hasn't come yet."

A lazaretto had been set up for doubtful cases, the two hospitals were crowded, those who went in or out of the city were examined. A series of edicts had been issued by the mayor, ordering the most minute precautions.

"It's awful," concluded the farmer, who was giving these details.

Grandfather declared that we were perfectly com-

fortable at the Alpette, but Louise was chafing with impatience.

Little by little the days grew shorter. After the month of August, which was very warm, September came, with fresher breezes, and September passed. The oaks and birches in the forest were changing colour among the changeless pines, the oaks turning red and the birches golden. The dried tufts of bushes on the rocks took on a scarlet tint. I was sometimes overtaken by the darkness which rose rapidly from the hollow of the valley, and losing my way was forced to seek the aid of a shepherd in some hamlet whose twinkling lights shone out and guided me.

At last we were informed that the pestilence was abating, and we might soon leave the Alpette. I heard the news without pleasure, intoxicated with liberty as I had become during my long period of idleness. Still, we were to remain a few days longer.

III

THE END OF A REIGN

All night a high wind had been blowing, but by morning it had fallen. October was coming in badly. After breakfast I went out to see what damage the storm had wrought. Autumn had come suddenly. In the woods the oak leaves and beech leaves, leaves red and golden, torn from the trees where they had been glowing like flowers, rustled under my tread, and as in old times when I was little and used to steal out to gather forbidden nuts and crack them afterwards on the fire dogs, I let my feet drag, delighting in their crisp and plaintive chime.

Returning at nightfall I saw a cart standing before the door of the chalet. The headlight was not lighted and it was growing dark, so that I did not perceive till I was close by that it was our farmer's cart. The horse had not been taken out, but no one was watching it, though some one had taken the precaution to put a blanket over its back.

"Well, Stephen," said I, entering the kitchen where the farmer was warming himself, for it was already cold on the mountains, "what brings you here?"

We always called him by his first name, as is the custom in our country, although he was already old.

His hands were outstretched toward the stove, but he turned his wrinkled, shaven face toward me, the lamp, that moment lighted, revealing it clearly to me.

His light eyes, faded through long service in all weathers, seemed not to see me clearly.

"Ah, Master Francis," he murmured low, as he rose.

I can not tell why, but the meaningless exclamation gave me a painful impression.

"You haven't come for us?" I asked.

He was about to reply when we were joined by my sister Louise, who had been told of his arrival. She greeted him in a friendly way and asked what news he brought from town. He seemed in no haste to reply.

"The news is," he said at last, "that Madame wants you."

"Madame?" asked Louise.

"Very well," I observed, "and how soon?"

"To be sure it is too late for you to go down to-night. The beast is tired and it is already dark. To-morrow morning, very early."

Why such haste? We should hardly have time for our packing. I was about to protest, but the farmer slipped away — he must put out the horse, and get the cart under cover. During his absence I protested against so hurried a departure. In fact the prospect of quitting this place filled me with sadness, and I again lived through the sense of desolation which had come over me in the wood, strewn with the

dead leaves. Louise paid no attention and I saw that she was crying. Was she so sorry to go?

"I am afraid," she said to me.

Afraid of what? Grandfather, being informed of our recall, showed as little enthusiasm as I.

"We weren't so badly off here," he said. "We could do as we chose."

As if he hadn't always done as he chose! But what was Louise afraid of? By degrees she told us. For the farmer to be sent for us, there must be some one sick at our house, some one gravely ill. He had said "Madame has sent for you." Then it wasn't mamma, it could be no one but father. This was what she conjectured, as she confessed to us.

We tried to smile at her fears, comparing her to Abbé Heurtevant who carried thunder about with him and set it off at the least provocation; but by degrees her fear became ours. We waited feverishly for the return of the farmer whom we at once questioned. It was Louise who spoke.

"Father is sick, isn't he, Stephen?"

"Ah, Miss, it's a great misfortune."

"Has he taken the disease?"

"It isn't the disease that he has taken; it's a chill and fever."

Poor Louise burst into tears, calling upon our father as if he could hear her. We had to comfort her, not without blaming her for giving way, the farmer himself joining in.

"The young lady is mistaken. Master Michael

is strong. There's many a one has had chills and fever who is fat and healthy to-day."

The thought never occurred to me that there could be any real danger. My self absorption prevented my thinking so. What an absurd presentiment that poor Louise was torturing herself with! I could see my father there, before the entrance, just as the carriage started. His panama, slightly tilted, cast a shadow over half his face. The other, in full sunlight, was radiant with life. He was giving brief orders and hastening us into the vehicle because he was waited for at the mayor's office. How well he could command, and how every one hastened to obey him! I was the only one who thought of withdrawing myself from his power, his ascendency. He held himself upright like an oak in the forest, one of those tall fine oaks that never shed their leaves till the new ones come, that the tempest can never shake, that seem to stand all the straighter and grow tougher by resistance. I could hear his voice ringing out, his voice saying *Forward!* as in battle. I could not admit that that strength could be overcome. I had counted upon that strength. I must needs count upon it, because later, when I judged best, and had achieved my liberty I wanted to go back, of my own free will, and show my father a little love.

Yet I recalled to mind the day when I had heard him utter in mother's room a lament over me: "*That child is no longer ours. . . .*"

But I would not dwell on that. No, no, I must exaggerate nothing. Mother had recalled us because the abating epidemic no longer threatened danger, and because father, being ill, would be glad to see us; she had sent for us for these reasons and for none other. . . .

We went down early next morning, Louise and I in the farmer's cart, grandfather and the children a little later by the diligence which after all was more comfortable. I turned around many times to imprint upon my memory the picture of that valley, where in solitude I had met so many emotions created by myself, as it were a sort of happiness in which the others had no part. Seated beside me Louise never spoke except to lean toward our old Stephen and ask him gently,

"Couldn't you go a little faster?"

"Yes, Miss, we'll try. Biquette is a little like me, she's not very young."

He let his whip play around the mare's flanks, without actually touching her. As we drew nearer to the town my sister's anxiety increased, and at last affected me. She repeated her contagious "I'm afraid," and only the fine October sunshine, warming us on our seat, helped me to repel so absurd a presentiment.

We reached the gate at last. No one was waiting for us. How many times had I found father at that place, gazing down the road, and as soon as he saw us hailing us with word and gesture, with all

the paternal gladness of his heart! I looked up at the window. The usual shadow was not there, behind the curtain, and for the first time I knew that sorrow threatened us all.

Mother, as soon as she was informed of our arrival, came down to meet us. Louise threw herself into her arms without a word. By a natural intuition those kindred souls understood one another. I remained apart, determined not to understand, refusing to admit even the possibility of a calamity which would leave me no time to play, at my own convenience, the drama of the return of the prodigal son. Mother came to me:

"He talks of you most of all," she said. "In his delirium he was calling for you."

I was thunderstruck at this pre-eminence. Why did he talk most of me? Why was I his chief preoccupation, and — my mind leaping forward, even while awestricken at the sacrilegious thought,— perhaps his last?

"Mamma," I cried, "it isn't possible!"

But I at once regretted the involuntary exclamation. My mother was the living proof that there was no danger, at least not yet. Of course I remarked the circles round her eyes and her white cheeks, the tokens of nights of watching. But though weariness was evident in her every feature, it was as if it did not exist: one felt a higher will dominating it, or utilising it so long as might be necessary. And by a strange phenomenon, there was now in her man-

ner of speaking, and of treating us, something — I could not say what, but I knew it was there — something of my father's authority. Visibly, without knowing it, she was replacing him. But if there had been any danger she would have shown her woman's weakness, she who was so quick to be anxious, and often about nothing at all, she so prompt to hear the approaching thunderstorm and light the blessed candle for our safety! I did not even see the holy light that always when night came down kept watch in her eyes like the little altar lamp in the sanctuary. No, no, if there had been any danger she would have asked for our help, and I would have sustained her with my youthful strength.

"Is what possible?" she replied to my question — thus completely reassuring me. She made no other reply, as if she hadn't quite heard, but quite simply, in a gentle voice which endeavoured not to give pain, she went on to tell us what had taken place in our long absence.

"He is resting just now. Your Aunt Deen is with him. She has helped me much in nursing him. I'll take you to his room presently. You can not imagine the effort which these last months have required of him. That is the cause of his illness, after he had overcome the pestilence, when his task was finished. Until then, I had never been able to get him to spare himself. Day and night he would be sent for, appealed to, as if there were no one but he. The whole town waited on his orders, begged for his help. His

commands were the only ones that inspired confidence, but the demands were more than human strength could endure, and he did in fact go beyond human strength. They never gave him a moment's respite — they thought him stronger than the stones that bear up the house, but even stones will break under too heavy a burden. One evening, just six days ago, he came home with a heavy chill. And almost immediately fever appeared. Oh, if he had not so overtaxed himself!"

She checked herself without completing her thought,— or did she not follow it out when she added after a moment's reflection,

"I have notified Stephen, in Rome. Last evening he telegraphed me that he was setting out. I am glad that his Superior has permitted him to leave — it is a very long journey: we must give him almost twenty-four hours. I write every day to Bernard who is so far away. And Mélanie is praying for us."

Thus she was gathering the family around its head. I asked,

"Why does not Mélanie come?"

"The Sisters of Charity never go back to their homes."

"They nurse strangers and may not nurse their father!"

"It is the rule, Francis."

Since it was the rule she had no recriminations to make; she bowed to it, accepted it, while I,— as soon

as it became the rule, my first impulse was to rebel. Timorous as she was when he was there, now with unfaltering presence of mind she was preparing all that would be needed in case of misfortune, without ever ceasing to bend all her energies to ward it off. I felt shame for not having shared her anxieties and for having sought to separate myself from the community of sorrow.

"The fever has diminished," she went on, going over all the encouraging symptoms for our sakes and her own. "The first days he was delirious much of the time. He has been more calm since yesterday. He himself keeps track of the progress of his disease. I see, but he says nothing about it. This morning he asked for a priest. Abbé Heurtevant, whom he cured, came."

He himself keeps track of the progress of his disease, and *he asked for a priest;* the poor woman did not connect the two, so natural did it seem to her to ask the help of God. But I — how could I not connect them? And for the third time I distinctly felt the danger.

We heard Aunt Deen's step at the head of the stairs; it was growing heavy. She called *Valentine!* in a subdued voice and we all hastened to the staircase.

"Oh, he is doing well," she explained, "but he is awake, and he always asks for you if you are not there."

"You may go with me," mother said to Louise,

then turning to me she added that she would call me next; it wasn't well for too many to enter the room at once, lest our presence should agitate the sufferer.

As soon as we were alone Aunt Deen, who must greatly have held herself in during her hours of watching, exploded:

"Ah, my boy, if you knew! 'They' have killed him — killed him without mercy! The whole town was infected and had no hope except in him. I have seen it, I tell you, those people with their dirty pustules all over their bodies. They would be crying like lost souls, and when your father entered the hospital they would be silent because he had ordered it, but they would hold out their arms to him. How many he has cured! It's he who saved them all, he and no one else. And the fountains closed, and the water analysed, and the clothing of the dead burned, and the lazaretto set up, all sorts of hygienic measures. Indeed, the very best there are. You should have seen how he commanded everything! Monsieur Mayor, it's impossible! 'It must be done by to-morrow.' But for him there wouldn't be a person in the streets to-day. And now, now, it's as much as ever if any one comes to ask how he is! The rumour has spread that he has caught the typhus,— the last one. They are afraid and they abandon him — the wretches!"

Thus she pictured the general cowardice and ingratitude. My father stood out above this disor-

derly crowd. But Aunt Deen had begun on another subject.

"Your mother is admirable. She has not gone to bed once since his illness. And she keeps calm. You have seen how calm she is. For my part I can't understand her."

As she had just left the room above I tried to get at the truth of the case.

"Well, Aunt, is he —"

But I could not go on, and she caught up my inquiry, the impiety of which had burned my lips, as if I had spoken against the Holy Ark.

"Oh, no, no, no! God will protect us! What would become of us, my poor child, what would become of us! A man such as there are not two of in the world!"

Just then Louise, coming softly down, joined us, all in tears. Father was expecting me.

At the door of his room I paused, heavy of heart. By that oppression I saw clearly that he was the essential actor in the inner drama of my childhood and youth, my short but already so important life. I had lived by him but I was living in opposition to him. From the day when I had withdrawn myself from his influence, through all the exaltation which had transported me and yet left me in a state of uneasiness, I had felt myself free, but out of my frame. In what condition should I find him? I was afraid, and that is why I paused for a time before opening the door. On leaving home, after having seen him

cheered by the whole town, I had carried away with me the picture of my father leaning against the house, assured victor over the pestilence as long ago he had been victor over those dreaded mole-crickets, cheerfully bearing the burden of a city in distress, counting upon the future as on the past, in a word, immortal,—one to whom in his authority I could therefore give pain without scruple,— and now, in a second, I should see him — how? He was there, on the other side of that door, motionless, laid low, humiliated, no longer leading every one like a flock, fighting on his own account against the insidious disease that was consuming him. I felt a sort of terror of this inevitable contrast, mingled, I have to confess, with a personal horror of the sight of humiliation.

Well, there was neither humiliation nor contrast. I went in and saw him. Stretched at full length upon the bed he seemed even taller than when standing — that was indisputable. His head was lying back upon the bolster and I was especially struck with the forehead, that broad forehead luminous with the light that sifted through the curtains. The unwonted thinness only emphasised the nobility of the features. There was no trace either of anxiety or fear, and as for suffering, if its mark was there it had brought with it no inferiority. His eyes were closed, but at times he opened them wide, almost startlingly. When had I thus seen them take on the imprint of the things at which he was gazing?

Before Mélanie's last farewell they used so to fix themselves upon my sister, upon my sister who was to go away for always, and whom he would never see again.

His whole attitude, his whole expression was gathering itself together, or rather was fixing itself in its highest character: he had not ceased to command. And my first word, my only word, was a consent to his command.

"Father," I said, standing beside the bed.

I did not utter the word in the sense of filial piety, but because his ascendency subjugated me, overawed me. Yes, in this dimly lighted chamber, heavy with the odour of medicines, suffering and fever, that complex odour which is as it were the advance herald of death, I mechanically came back into subordination, as a soldier about to desert returns to his place in the ranks under the eye of his chief. I was aware of this change in myself. That mysticism in which I had so revelled and which isolated me from all the universe, melted away like clouds before the first rays of dawn. I recognised my dependence, and all the truth of my childish thoughts when they used to begin by making the tour of the house, and the antiquity and the justice of the power still held in those weakening hands, which clasped with pale rigid fingers a little crucifix which at first I had not observed.

I thought I had spoken aloud, but he could not have heard me, for he did not turn toward me. I could hear his low voice — that voice that I remem-

bered so ringing — whispering as if he were reciting a litany.

"What is he saying?" I asked softly of my mother, who drew near.

"Your names," she murmured. "Listen!"

Yes, one after another he was naming us all. Those of the three elder had already passed his lips: he pronounced that of Louise. It was my turn, but he passed it and named Nicola, then James. The omission hurt me cruelly, but I had hardly had time to feel it when I heard my name, last of all, detached and set apart. Suddenly I remembered Martinod's odious insinuations as to his preference for one of my brothers; and I understood that no one of us was the favourite, but that just because of the anxiety I had given I had been the object of a special solicitude. The irresistible desire swept over me to reveal to him, in a word, the change that had suddenly taken place in me. He used to dwell with such interest and even such respect upon our vocation — believing that it would be the basis of our whole life — I had systematically put aside mine, to make sure of my liberty. Now, with full conviction, I had recovered it. Taking a step forward I said firmly:

"Father, I am here. It is I. Upon the mountain I reflected. Don't you know? I want to be a doctor, like you."

On the mountain? That was not true, but did not piety command me to conceal the cause of my change of mind? He did not show the joy that I

expected — perhaps he could no longer show joy over anything. Perhaps another work, the last, that of detachment, was going on in him. He lifted to me his almost terrifying eyes.

"Francis," he repeated.

He tried to raise his hand to lay it upon my head. Though I leaned low over him he could not do it, and his arm fell back. I kneeled, that he might do it with less effort. He did not even try, as I had hoped, but in that low voice in which he had named us one by one, he said distinctly:

"Your turn has come."

My mother, who was a little behind, drew near to ask me the same question that I had asked her:

"What is he saying?"

I made an instinctive movement as if to say that I did not precisely know — yet I had clearly heard him, and after a moment of hesitation, the expression ceased to be mysterious to me. I could see in it an evidence of confidence in the past. My father had not admitted my treachery, my enfranchisement, he had been sure that I would return to him; he counted upon me. But in its form as from beyond the tomb the utterance had a still deeper significance, which completely overcame me; my father was tendering to my weakness the royal crown of the family, inviting me to wear it after him, because I should be, at home, his successor, his heir. I had never thought of that.

Did my mother understand the emotion which

bowed and shattered me? She reminded me that I needed food after my long journey in the cold air, and went with me to the door.

"Valentine," murmured the sick man.

"I am not leaving you, dear." And she turned from me to hurry back to him.

I did not leave the room, but remained and witnessed a scene which almost without words, apparently obscure and far away, was only all the more clear to me.

My father began by saying:

"Listen!" He was looking at no one at the moment; his eyes were fixed on the ceiling above him. He made no haste to speak, he was gathering himself together. An indescribable anguish swept over me. I divined that my presence had shaken him, and that he was collecting his thoughts as to the future of the family. What he had to say to my mother was doubtless his last wish on the subject. Had I not a right to hear, since *my turn had come?*

Perhaps my mother, too, understood. She was at the bedside, leaning over, and the sheet which hung out against her knee shook slightly. I am sure I saw it shake — was it the trembling of her knee? And then I saw nothing except one face.

My father was still silent. I could hear the monotonous moan of the fountain in the court. Mother urged him tenderly:

"My love, my dear love . . ."

His mind was entirely lucid. He had *himself fol-*

lowed the progress of his disease, he knew precisely how he was. At her words he seemed to emerge from the thoughts in which he was plunged; he turned his head slightly and looked at my mother with his almost awe-inspiring gaze, which penetrated deeply into her heart.

"Valentine," he repeated, simply.

"You had something to say to me?"

With infinite gentleness he murmured: "Oh, no, Valentine. I have nothing to say to you."

I am sure that he had meant to confide to her the future of the house, and one gaze had been enough to silence him. That gaze alone had told him that there was no need. She who was there, close beside him, was she not his flesh and his heart? All those years together, day by day, without one difference of opinion, one cloud, had made them indissolubly one. What could one utterance add to all that? Was ever greater evidence of love given to wife than that silence, that confidence, that peace! . . .

After those high moments I was overpowered by the human cowardice which finds a sort of solace in absence from the scene of calamity. I left the room. Grandfather was getting down from the diligence with Nicola, already a big girl, growing serious, and Jamie, lighter minded, whose twelve years were not yet troubled by any presentiment. Grandfather was anxiously superintending the transportation of his violin case and his almanacs; his

collection of pipes was not to be entrusted to any hands but his own. Aunt Deen attended in person to the heavy luggage. Notwithstanding her years and declining strength, she still took upon herself a servant's duties. Physical effort alone could relieve her mind; with her, sorrow expressed itself in increased activity.

Once in the house, grandfather wandered about like a soul in pain. He hovered around the sick room without venturing to enter. He dared not ask questions, and in his uncertainty he made his moan to any one whom he saw:

"I am getting old. I am old."

They saw one another, but I was not present. It was not necessary to be present to realise what it must have been, and that the son, inevitably, supported and comforted the father. If life does not draw from a religious heart the fervour of a constant upward progress, one must always remain what one has been. For some the burden, for others the looking on. And even the approach of death does not change things.

As evening drew on, grandfather, who was dragging himself from room to room, bemoaning himself, timidly proposed that we should take a walk.

"That's a good idea," said Aunt Deen, who understood him. "There are two or three errands at the chemist's and the grocer's."

He manifested a childish joy at being made useful and I did not refuse to go with him. After the soli-

tude of the mountain, with its silent nights, we found a secret pleasure in the lighted streets and the coming and going of people. The epidemic had been completely checked; the sanitary measures which had been ordered left not the slightest danger to be feared. Awakened from its nightmare, the town was giving itself over to transports of joy, the reaction from terror. I had seen it in its consternation rushing with loud cries to seek salvation in one man, and I found it now in all the heyday and thoughtlessness of a festival. The autumn softness floated like a perfume over all. The shops were lighted up. The pavements were crowded with people and the cafés overflowed to the very street. The women were in light dresses which they had not been able to wear all summer, and jaunty in their fresh costumes transformed the season into a belated spring. After so much mourning life was sweet, and funerals were relegated to the background.

I was the son of their saviour. I expected tokens of popular favour, and behold people avoided us, as I was not slow to see. The sight of that old man and that youth forced upon them the thought of their benefactor, and recalled the evil days through which they had passed. Evidently no one wanted to think of them. We should have liked to talk over all the troubles, but no one gave us an opportunity.

Finally, some one spoke to us. It was Martinod, Martinod with his pursed-up mouth and sleek beard who, without giving me time to shake him off, began

to talk of my father admiringly, eloquently, enthusiastically, awarding him full and entire justice, celebrating his courage, his organising ability, his medical skill, his marvellous art of directing men. I had resolved, on seeing him, to turn my back upon him with contempt, and here I was, full of gratitude, drinking in his words — forgetting his calumnies, his base manœuvres, his secret plots, which had so nearly destroyed the unity of our family. I ought to have been seeking upon his face the mark imprinted by my father's hand, and here I was listening to his brazen encomiums. I was still too simple minded to imagine what he was designing.

Gallus and Merinos, who next met us, were quite ready to descant upon themselves and the cruel trials from which they had fortunately emerged. We tried to speak of poor Cassenave and the unlucky Galurin, but they changed the subject by informing us that one of them was composing a Funeral March and the other a *Danse Macabre*, in commemoration of the historic typhus. I have never learned that either was finished.

When we returned home, somewhat cheered up by the change, we met Mariette at the door, full of indignant wrath. She had served us for more than twenty years, and never thought of controlling herself in our presence. The little doctor who had long ago visited me in my attack of pleurisy had attempted to slip a gold piece into her hand, begging her to give his name and address to the patients

who continued to crowd to our house, and with an emphatic gesture she had thrown his gold at his head.

"The wretched creature!" exclaimed Aunt Deen, who had witnessed the incident from the staircase. "Ah! *they* are all just alike!"

And I ceased to deny the existence of those who surrounded us, "they," and knew that calamity was impending over us.

A little later in the evening, just before the dinner hour, as the bell rang I went myself to the door, thinking that it might be my brother Stephen, arriving from Rome, whence he had been recalled the previous evening. I saw before me in the shadow, for the vestibule lamp but feebly lighted the door-step, one of our poor people, old Yes-Yes, with his ever-nodding head. I knew that he was still alive, though Zeeze Million had carried her dreams of fortune with her to the grave. Why did he come on another day than Saturday, the regular day of the poor?

"Wait," I said. "I'll go for some money."

But he caught my arm almost familiarly.

"Yes, yes," he began, "that's not it."

"What then?"

"Yes, yes, he cured me, you understand. So it's to learn, yes, to learn how he is."

Full of gratitude he had come for information. I spoke more gently, as I replied:

"Always the same, friend."

"Ah, ah! yes, yes, so much the worse."

I wondered why he did not go. Did he after all, hope for a little money? Suddenly, like a stammerer who has succeeded in getting hold of his words, and makes the most of it, he thrust his face close to mine, exclaiming:

"He — he — he was a man! Yes, yes."

And he at once disappeared in the darkness. I gazed into the shadows which had swallowed him up, and then suddenly closed the door; — but too late, for it seemed to me that some one had come in, an invisible some one who took his way up the stairs, through the passage, to the room. I tried to cry out, but my lips uttered no sound; and I thought to myself that if I had cried out they would have thought me crazy. I stood there paralysed, knowing that some one had come into the house before me, and that I could not drive out him who was there, before me, who would not go out, who was noiselessly going up the stairs, his actual presence unsuspected by all but me.

Now I understood the true, the irreparable meaning of what I had vaguely seen without admitting that I saw it. That poor stammering creature had said "He was a man," speaking of my father in the past tense, speaking of my father as if my father was no longer living. Then that invisible presence which had come in by the open door was Death. For the first time it seemed to me an active thing, for the first time Death seemed to me — there is no other

word — *alive*. Until that moment I had attached no importance to its acts. And in my horror and impotence, I stood there, my arms hanging helpless at my sides.

Long ago, when we had been in danger of losing the house, I had been born into the unknown sense of grief; now I was born into the sense of death. And I felt all the cruelty of the parting, before it had come to pass.

As in that long ago time, I fled into the garden and threw myself upon the grass. The night was there before me; the earth was cold and seemed to repel me. The wind which had risen was wrenching the branches of the chestnut trees, and they groaned, uttering lamentations. Especially one of them, the one of the breach in the wall, never ceased moaning, and I thought to see it fall. I recalled to mind some that I had seen in the forest of the Alpette after a storm, prone upon the ground, at such length that the eye was astonished on measuring them from root to tip. And I recalled, too, that picture in my Bible of the tall cedars of Lebanon lying on the ground — those that were destined to be used in building the Temple in Jerusalem.

The beams of the roof seemed to be complaining, like the trees, and I expected to see the house fall into a heap. What would there be to wonder at, if the house did fall, since my father was dying?

IV

THE HEIR

Sorrows like these have their own modesty, and I throw a veil over mine. . . .

I resume my story at the time when we resumed our ordinary life. The first meal by ourselves consecrated its permanence, after the comings and goings of relatives and friends were over, with all the confusion inseparable from a house of mourning. My brother Stephen, who had hastened from Rome, had gone back to complete his theological studies. Mélanie was doubtless finding expression for her own grief by more complete devotion to all the sorrows of the hospital, and Bernard, far away, had acknowledged the blow by a brief cablegram in which we could measure his affection. We others, who remained, could now count one another like the wounded after defeat.

The bell rang and we must go to the dining-room. Grandfather came in from his walk; he was bent and broken, he leant upon his cane, bemoaning himself about something, I can not tell what. Something had gone wrong, he himself could not quite understand.

"Ah!" he sighed, all out of breath. "I thought I should never get back to the house."

He spoke as we used to speak when we were little. But had we ever left off saying The House? I saw him so old and weak and hardly realised that it was he who used to take me into the woods and on the lake, in those days when both of us used to sally forth in all tranquillity for the conquest of liberty. In my transformation, going to the other extreme, I gazed upon him now with an excessive pity which bordered upon contempt.

Yes, when the soldiers are on the ramparts the town may question and discuss, may they not? It questions and discusses the utility of arms and fortifications, their destruction appearing a slight thing. But what if there are no soldiers and the enemy is at the gates?

Thus in the old days we could talk of our desires and our dreams, of the commonwealth of the future, and above all, of our dear liberty. We could, then, and now we can no more, for there is no one defending us, and we are face to face with life, with our own destinies. He is no longer here, grandfather, who used to mount guard on the ramparts for the whole family.

Aunt Deen was putting finishing touches to the table. She was very old to impose so much labour upon herself, never stopping to rest from morning till night.

"Don't, aunt, it is not your work."

But she protested and muttered and began to weep aloud.

"You mustn't prevent my working. I feel it less when I am working."

Didn't I know, too, that there was now no one in the kitchen but Mariette, because things were changed with us? Each of us must do his part, and Aunt Deen, as usual, began first.

Louise was no longer gay, as she used to be. She came in, leading her sister Nicola, as if to protect her. Why did I look more lovingly at their fair hair? Was I already thinking of the new uncertainties of their future? Jamie, left mostly to himself these latter days, had not been good, and my mother was reproving him. He probably thought that she would never think of scolding him, and all astonishment, he obeyed. And now we must take our seats around the table.

Mother had taken her old place in the middle, and I found in her manner, in her voice gentle as always, an indescribable new authority, inexplicable and yet to be felt. She turned to grandfather, who came next.

"It is for you to take *his* place," she said indicating my father's chair, opposite to hers.

"Oh, not I!" exclaimed grandfather with agitation. "Valentine, I can't take that place. I am nothing now but an old beast."

She urged, but in vain; nothing would induce him to yield. Then my mother turned to me with that expression, at once calm and frightened, which she had worn ever since — since she became a widow.

"It must be you," she said.

Without a word I seated myself in my father's place and for a few moments I found it impossible to speak. Why this emotion for so simple and natural a thing? So simple and so natural indeed was the transmission of authority.

I have compared the house to a kingdom, and the succession of heads of the family to a dynasty. And now this dynasty had come to me. My mother was exercising the regency, and I was wearing the crown. And now I learned at the same time its weight and its honour. As before this I had been born into sorrow and into death, I was now born into the sense of my responsibility in life. Indeed I do not know whether I can compare the feeling that took possession of me with any other emotion. It pierced my heart with that sharp and cruel dart which is generally attributed to love. And from my wound sprang up, as it were, a gush of red blood, the sense of exaltation which was to colour all my life — blood which, far from subtracting from life's forces, would add to the eternal defences of our race.

Thus, before I had attained the age of man, I entered, by anticipation, upon the great struggle which without fail forms a part of every human existence, the struggle between liberty and acceptance, between the horror of servitude and the sacrifices which are the price of permanence. A delightful but dangerous teacher had early revealed to me the miraculous charm of nature, of that very love and pride with

which we think to bring the earth into subjection, but this too sweet and enervating charm would never again entirely possess me. My life was henceforth fixed to an iron ring: it would no longer depend upon my own fancy. Toward the mirages of happiness I should henceforth reach out only fettered hands. But these fetters are those which every man must one day assume, whether he actually mounts a throne or whether his empire is only over an acre or a name. Like a king I was responsible for the decadence or the prosperity of the kingdom — The House.

A few days later, since I must begin my medical studies, I also was obliged to go away, for a time. This parting tore my heart: in the zeal of my new part, I would fain have believed my presence necessary to my mother, who must be quite crushed by the loss of him who was her life. Her calmness, however, surprised me, and also the clearness of her judgment, and that mysterious new authority that every one felt. At the time of the funeral Martinod had begged for the honour of making a speech, reminding all present of my father's devotion to the public weal, but she had refused. I could not understand her repelling a repentant enemy, and would willingly have given a contrary opinion. But not long afterward we learned that Martinod, hoping to capture the Mayor's office, had counted upon thus making use of the dead to regain his lost popularity.

Aunt Deen's *they* had not laid aside their arms. They would never lay them aside. But the hearthstone had its watchful guardians, neither to be duped nor lulled to sleep.

But there would be loneliness there, with only Nicola and Jamie. Grandfather would hardly count, for he was failing from day to day. He who had always had such horror of enclosures now asked almost every evening if the doors were locked and bolted. What did he fear? Once, arousing from a doze, he earnestly called for his father. Aunt Deen took him up almost roughly:

"You know very well that he has been dead these thirty years!"

To our stupefaction he quickly replied,

"No, no, not him, the other."

"What other? What do you mean?"

"The one who was there a little while ago," he said, pointing in the direction of the consulting room.

Then we understood that there was a confusion of generations in his brain. He felt that he had lost his support, and very naturally our father had become his.

Much affected by his confusion of mind, I became more just to him. Together we had lost the empire of liberty.

The evening before my departure I went to my mother's room. I had expected to lend her courage for our parting, and behold I was weaker and more agitated than she.

"I shall come back," I said positively, "and I shall try to follow *him*."

We never spoke of him otherwise, among ourselves.

"Yes," she replied, "*your turn has come*."

Then she had heard and understood. And as, my head on her shoulder, I expressed my sorrow at leaving her in her trouble, she comforted me.

"Listen; we must not be sad."

Was it she who spoke thus? I raised my head in surprise and looked at her; her face, ravaged by trials, chiselled by the sorrow of the most ardent love, was almost colourless. All its expression centred in her eyes, so gentle, so pure, so limpid. She was changed and aged. And yet there was in her an indescribable firmness which she imparted to all around her, no one knew how.

"Don't be surprised," she said. "That first night I was so overwhelmed with despair that I prayed God to take me. I cried unto Him and He heard me. He sustained me, but in another way. I had not believed enough. Now I believe as we ought to believe. We are not parted, don't you see? — We are going forward to meet again."

A Book of Hours was lying on the work table beside her. I mechanically took it up. It opened of itself to a page which she must have read often.

"Read it aloud," she said.

It was the prayer of the dying, to be recited during the approach of death:

"*Leave this world, Christian soul, in the name of God the Father Almighty who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of the living God who suffered for thee; in the name of Angels and Archangels, of Thrones and Dominations; in the name of Principalities and Powers, of Cherubim and Seraphim; in the name of the Patriarchs and Prophets, and of the Holy Apostles and Evangelists; in the name of the Holy Martyrs and Confessors, in the name of the holy Monks and Solitaries, in the name of the holy Virgins, and of all the Saints of God. May thy dwelling be this day in peace and thy habitation in the Holy Places!* . . ."

All heaven assembled to receive the Soul to whom the portals of Life were opened.

We are not parted; we are going forward to meet again; I understood the meaning of her words.

In the silence that followed my reading, once more I heard the monotonous lament of the fountain in the court, and I recalled my father's confidence when, about to speak, confidence had closed his lips. What could he have said to my mother which she would not know from him? She was still living with him. She would finish his work, and then she would go to join him. It was so simple; and this was why she was so at peace.

Her calmness communicated itself to Aunt Deen, always at work, and ever on the lookout for the most humiliating duties, polishing floors or blacking shoes, as if she would punish herself for having outlived her nephew. And when mother gently took her to task for her excessive devotion, she would protest with tears, as if begging a favour.

As at evening one sees the village lights come out, one by one, along the slopes, so I could see the lights of our house shining out even beyond our own horizon, to the ends of the world, and even beyond the world. They were shining for the absent as well as for the present, for Mélanie at the bedside of the poor, for Stephen at Rome, and for Bernard, soldier of the outposts in his far distant colony. And they were shining still higher.

And it seemed to me that the walls whose restrictions I had deplored during my years of youth, during my mad search for liberty, were opening of themselves to let me pass out. They no longer kept me a prisoner. How should they keep me a prisoner? Wherever I might henceforth go, I should carry with me a bit of earth, a bit of my earth, as if I had been made of its dust, as God made the first man.

That evening, the eve of my departure, my faith in The House became faith in The Eternal House where the dead live again in peace. . . .

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